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### AN

# IDEAL FANATIC:

BY

### HESTER EDWARDS PORCH.

"What profits us that we from Heaven derive,
A soul immortal, and with looks erect,
Survey the stars, if like the brutal kind,
We follow where our passions lead the way."

-Dryden.



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## AN IDEAL FANATIC.

#### CHAPTER I.

DEAD SEA FRUIT.

"Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet."
—Longfellow.

ROM the unclouded sky of a summer morning, the sun glowed down upon an orchard more than usually picturesque with both neglect and age. Trees in every stage of decay and of development were closely mingled, and seemed to mark the generations that had passed, since they first blossomed into fruit. Some had grown to huge size, and their moss-grown trunks and barren limbs, still cumbered the ground, to hinder the fairer development of the coming species. Yet, notwithstanding this, and all other untoward circumstances, Nature had seemed to do her utmost in thwarting these baleful influences, and had not only given luxuriant limbs and stately height to many of the later generations, but had bounteously crowned them with the glory and purpose of their existence. Fruit almost tropical in perfection, each after its kind, ladened their boughs heavily, and hung motionless in the summer air.

This was especially true of a pear-tree which had grown to uncommon breadth and height. Beneath

its spreading branches a slender, dark-eyed girl, stood gazing wishfully upward at the luscious fruit that was beyond her reach. She had tried every available means to bring it down; shaken the tree's lowest limbs, thrown stone after stone, and only a few over-ripe and damaged ones had rewarded her efforts.

A moment she stood irresolute; not that she contemplated leaving it,—she was only hesitating as to the means she should employ to procure it.

"Of what good is my knowing how to climb," she soliloquized, "if I cannot put it into use when it is so much needed? And I certainly never wished for anything half so much as for this tempting fruit. Annetta promised me that I should have what this tree would bear. Since the bursting of its first tiny bud I have watched the growing fruit; and shall I leave it now? To-day it is Annetta's to give; to-morrow it may be its lawful owner's."

Once more she gazed up eagerly; then a resolute look flashed from her dark eyes. She took up her basket, placed it on her arm and stepped to the tree.

"It is so long since I have even tried to climb," she said aloud, "and I have grown so tall and awkward; but that which is not worth our best efforts to procure is scarcely worth the procuring."

Stimulated by this sound philosophy, she began the ascent, which proved less difficult than she had feared; the tree being old and having many gnarls and outgrowths with which to grapple. In the very midst of the alluring fruit she was soon seated, elated almost as much by the daring feat as by the prize it won her. The pears once gathered, she en joyed so much her eyrie perch, that she was loth to leave it, and was so happy in the accomplishment of her desire that, in the glad exuberance of youth, she sang aloud the merriest song she knew, a rol licking hunter's carol.

"What will Annetta say if she hears me?" she said to herself at last. Then laughing softly, she thought, "I will sing her favorite song and be off, before she has time to find me, if she should try;" and Auld Robin Gray, in a clear, sweet voice, floated out upon the morning air. When the sound of the last note died away, she climbed up slowly from her seat, and was preparing to descend, when, to her horror, she saw approaching, not Annetta, whose possible coming she had thought playfully to elude, but a man, both young and handsome. Her unlady like elevation was certainly sufficiently embarrassing, but, added to this, she had the fear that he would believe her a thief, and viewed her position in far too tragic a manner, to be able to see anything ludicrous. Drawing her skirts closely about her, she crouched down against the tree, and hoped to escape obser vation. It was her song that had startled the gen tleman in his solitary walk through the grounds, and lured him to the garden wall; then left him benighted, but determined if possible to find the morning lark. He climbed over the wall into the orchard and looked around; no one was in sight, and not a sound was to be heard.

"Can I have been dreaming?" he thought

"Surely, that voice was human, and if so where is its corporeal presence?" He looked behind two or three large apple trees, examined carefully in and around a grove of quinces, and then went over and stopped in the shade, immediately below the trembling, frightened girl; picked up a pear that had fallen, sat down upon the long matted grass, and taking from his pocket a silver knife, ate the fruit leisurely.

"If I had only kept quiet," she thought, shivering with the torture of her unnatural position; "he
heard my voice, and has been hunting for me, and it
is small advantage to me, that he has given over the
chase, if he sits moping there all day. Who upon
earth can he be, anyway?"

The minutes rolled by, and seemed like hours to her-ten, fifteen, then half an hour had passed. She felt that her limbs were growing numb and cold, but feared to move, lest the cracking branches might betray her. All this time the gentleman seated beneath, had been enjoying the quiet of the lovely morning, and utterly forgetting the voice of the ignis fatuus that had lured him to the spot, (wooed to it by the familiar scene,) was looking back, through memory's golden gate, to those young, stainless years, that, even to the happy, seem always best and fairest. Tired at last of sitting, he took off his hat, and lolled back lazily upon the green sward. His eyes naturally turned upward, and he saw a girl's white, terror-stricken face. The situation was clear to him at once; he dropped his hat over his eyes, and made no sign that he had seen. In a minute or

two, he got up, walked leisurely off to a little distance and stopped. He was in a dilemma.

"If I thought she could get back safe to terra firma without my assistance, I would go off without a word," he said to himself; "but suppose she can't, then I would be a brute to leave her." With this impulse he spoke.

"Can I assist you to descend?" he asked gravely, and with perfect self-possession; which last, the piercing shriek that answered him completely shattered.

The sound of his voice was so unexpected, and her nerves so overwrought, that well nigh unconsciously, and without her own volition, she screamed aloud. The fruit-laden basket fell from her arm and it cost her an effort not to follow it. The noise startled the gentleman, who was still standing with his back to her, and he turned at once, fearing that she had herself fallen; but seeing that this was not true, he resumed his former position, and asked again, if he could assist her.

- "No!" was the churlish answer.
- "Do you think you can get down without my assistance?"
- "Yes, yes! if you will only go away," was the impatient reply. After a moment she continued excitedly, "I am not a thief; I was not stealing the pears, Annetta gave them to me."

The absurdity of the whole affair had been dawning upon him for a moment or two, and this last was too much for his already excited risibles. He burst into hearty, unrestrained laughter, and without an-

other word, walked off rapidly, in what direction she neither saw nor cared; it was enough to know that he was out of sight; straightening her stiffened limbs for a moment or two, she made a rather awkward descent, with the mental resolution, that when next she climbed, the tree would be her own, and within walls so high, that no man could intrude.

When she reached the ground, she smoothed as well as possible her crumpled hat, picked up her basket and started rapidly homeward, leaving behind her without a sigh, the precious fruit, that had cost her so dear. Reaching the woods she almost flew down the path that led to the gate which opened on the highway. When she came up to it, flushed, breathless, and trembling in every limb, she was dismayed to see the same gentleman leaning quietly against it.

He saw the flying figure, and when she stopped, with a prolonged "Oh—!" was surprised to find her so tall. Baring his blonde head, he bowed courteously, and said kindly.

"I see that your basket is empty, and I cannot permit you to take it so. You must return with me and gather the fruit of your toil; for certainly, such labor should not have been in vain."

She discovered a gleam of amusement in his eyes, and being a little indignant with him still, for having laughed at her, answered coldly.

"I do not care for it now, it is 'Dead Sea' fruit."

"But I think there is not the least danger of it turning to ashes on your lips," he replied, not a little amused by her manner. "Oh! not literally of course, but I could no longer take any delight in its possession, and therefore do not want it," she answered flatly.

"What a young philosopher you are," he said, smiling down at her, much interested as well as amused. He saw that she was becoming embarrassed by his not opening the gate and said very gently:

"I should like to know my first visitor's name; I have been so long a wanderer on the earth, that I am a stranger where I should be known best, in the very 'halls of my fathers.'"

The dark eyes dilated with amazement as she looked up at him and asked in a quick, eager voice,

- "Who are you, then? Not, surely, Mr. St. George of Olney Heights?"
  - "The very same," he answered, smiling.
- "Not the one I mean," she said, shaking her head dubiously; "for he is old, and has a wife and family. My father knew him well; he was a college friend, and my father is not young," she finished sententiously.
- "No doubt to your young eyes he does not seem so. What is your father's name?"
  - "Chester Vivien."
- "Is it possible that you are my old friend Chester's little daughter," he said, and holding out his hand to her added, "You must shake hands with me for your father's sake; in the old time we loved each other well."

She took his hand, but looked at him shyly, and still a little doubtfully. It was so hard for her to

believe that this almost boyish-looking man had been the comrade of her father's youth, forgetting, or not realizing that her father, who should have been in the very splendor of his manhood, from disease and care was old and worn at thirty-eight.

"Little doubter," he said, laughingly, seeing that she did not quite believe him. "I will go with you to your father, and let him prove my truth."

"If you are really Harold St. George," she said, hesitatingly, "you could not give my father a greater pleasure."

"Do you live here, or are you visiting your father's aunt?" he asked.

"My aunt is dead, and we live here," she replied, gravely.

"Well, I am surprised; I never thought of your father coming here to live. When I left home, eleven years ago, he certainly had no intention of doing so."

"Great misfortunes forced him to leave New York, and this little New-England farm, bequeathed to him by his aunt, is very nearly all that is left to him of a once large fortune."

"My poor friend Chester; I had not even heard of his misfortunes," he said, sadly.

"I was a very little girl when it all happened," she continued, "for it has been more than ten years ago, and of course I do not remember much of the old life; but I know that the change must have been terrible to both my father and mother."

"Is your father as fond of his bocks as ever?"

"Just as fond, and grows more so, if that be pos-

sible. Sometimes I am very jealous of them, but he is such a dear, kind father to me, that I love even his foibles."

- "Has he other children?"
- "I am my father's only child, but my mother has another daughter, Maud Tremaine."

He remembered then that his friend did marry a widow with one child. He had been often at their house in the first three years of their married life.

- "My little friend has not yet told me her own name," he said, after a moment's pause.
- "Oh, excuse me, sir! I had forgotten that you asked; Clare is my name."
- "Clare Vivien," he repeated, "a pretty name, and well suited to you. Now, if you will return with me, Miss Clare ——"
- "Don't call me that; no one has ever done so. I am plain Clare Vivien."
- "Well, then, Clare Vivien, he said, smiling into the lovely upturned eyes, that were the one glory of the wan young face, "if you will return with me to yonder pear-tree, and once more gather its discarded fruit, as your 'knight errant' I will go home with you and see your father."
- "Will you?" she asked, eagerly. "It will make him so happy; I will go back at once for the pears."

She started off so rapidly, that it was with some difficulty he kept pace with her. She no longer doubted his identity with the hero and Paladin she had heard of from childhood, although he was in nothing like the man she had expected to see.

When they had reached the pear-tree, he took the basket from her arm, filled it, and placed it on his own. Then they started off, this time to Clare's home.

They did not go far, before they were chatting as merrily and familiarly as might old long severed friends. His name alone was sufficient passport to her favor; and the bright piquant girl, even though she had not been Chester Vivien's daughter, would still have had a charm for him.

From Mr. Vivien's house you could see plainly the little town of Olney, and the river which went rushing by, turning its mills, and in fact doing almost everything for it that made it a town. When Clare and Mr. St. George reached the gate, she opened it and invited him to enter. A straight path, bordered on each side by beds of flowers, led up to the low vine-wreathed piazza. The house was an old-fashioned brick, somewhat rambling and with a queer gothic roof. On one side of the wide hall as they entered was the parlor; and on the other, Mr. Vivien's study, or library, as it was generally called. At the door of this room, Clare hesitated a moment before opening it. When they entered, Mr. St. George put down his basket, and stood waiting while she went softly to her father, who was alone, and laying her hand on his head, said, "Father?"

"What is it, my darling?" he asked, looking at her very tenderly.

"I have brought you a great surprise, and one that will give you pleasure," she answered, motioning Mr. St. George to approach. Mr. Vivien was mystified, but rose instinctively to his feet, and turning met suddenly his unexpected guest. They looked a moment in silence, and then,

"Harold!"

"Chester!"

came a glad cry from each man's lips. Long and earnestly they clasped hands, and Clare was standing near, her young eyes dim with happy tears.

#### CHAPTER II.

#### HE FINDS AN UNDINE.

"I wonder, friend, that it should be God's care
To have made at all, what matter when or how,
A being so sadly, desolately rare,
So beautifully incomplete as thou."

-FAWCETT.

THE past eleven years to Harold St. George had been as eventful, and in many things more harrowing than they had been to Chester Vivien; but he had far greater courage, and more physical ability to endure; and the passing years had left upon him few marring imprints.

When little beyond his majority, his father (who through life had lived prodigally), died, and left him for inheritance, only his enormous debts. At that father's bedside ere death had claimed its own, he made a solemn promise to redeem the old place, that had been for generations the home of a St. George; and the consummation of this aim, became to him not only a sacred duty, but his highest happiness. When the estate was finally settled up, barely enough remained to buy Olney Heights, its gardens, orchards, and a few surrounding acres. With only his energy, and sufficient money to defray his expenses for a few months, he started West; leaving his old home in the care of his father's gardener, James Lester, and his wife, Annetta; who being devoted to him,

and deeply attached to Olney Heights, proved that he could not have left it in better hands.

It had been his intention to make law his profession, and he had graduated at both Harvard and Edinburgh, Scotland; but his disastrous fortunes diverted him for a time from his purpose. In California he became acquainted with an intelligent Frenchman of good birth and some fortune, and soon interested himself with him in mining stocks and various other speculations, all of which were successful beyond their most sanguine hopes.

In a few years he was able to possess himself once more, of every foot of ground that had been the inheritance of a St. George. This sacred duty faithfully performed, the people of Olney heard little more of him. They knew that he had married; had practiced his profession in San Francisco, and that he stood high at the bar; but they knew nothing more; and as the years rolled on, and still he did not come, they began to fear that a St. George would never again hold hospitable court at Olney Heights. As the place was not for sale or rent, there seemed little hope of it being occupied during his lifetime.

Mr. St. George did not himself realize that he had inherited any of those vices which had so nearly proved the destruction of his race, but nothwithstanding this unconsciousness, was the veriest slave to one of the most dangerous and subtle of them, an almost insane love of the beautiful in both art and nature. He called it a worship of the ideal; and utterly ignoring its grossness, by every sophistry reason could frame, had taught himself to believe,

that physical and spiritual perfection were inseparable.

After six months acquaintance, he married Réné de Beausenante, the only child of his friend and partner, who was the spoiled darling of her father's heart. Her uncommon beauty took his heart by storm; she was his realized ideal in all its perfection. He was desperately in love with her; in love with a beauty that lured him to years of misery.

For six months she kept him in continual fear and torment; now favoring his suit, and now capriciously slighting it, until with the rashness of youth, and the exuberance of passion, he resolved, if possible, to end the conflict and make her his own.

He triumphed, and for eight bitter years paid full penalty for that triumph. He was, alas! not long discovering that the fair face and perfect form enshrined a dwarfed and puny mind. Her thoughts were not his thoughts, and those pleasures that seemed a necessity to her frivolous nature, soon palled upon his loftier aims. As his mind expanded and matured, hers stood still, and by very contrast, seemed to shrink and shrivel.

She was all he could ever hope to make her; in youth, a thing of beauty, bright, piquant, and when she would be, charming, and he was not more diligent in the pursuit of fame, than she in the pursuit of pleasure.

An epicurean in her philosophy to a high degree, she resolutely avoided whatever might give her pain. A careless, brilliant butterfly, she went thoughtlessly dancing down the shores of time, having no

thought, and no care, for the life her folly was marring.

Mr. St. George hoped much from the birth of their child. "It will be the soul that my Undine is so much in need of," he would say to himself.

The little being came, a ray of sunlight to him, a soul to be nurtured and trained; but to her, the toy and plaything of an idle hour, nothing more.

As the years rolled on, husband and wife grew wider and wider apart. In her way she was happy, having received from the world all she had asked of it; and knowing nothing of those higher joys that are the natural fruit of harmoniously blended lives. He permitted no wish of hers to pass unnoted or ungratified. "If these paltry things can make her happy, let her be happy," he would think. As for himself, he was desolate and aimless enough; the very fires of his ambition seemed quenched; and longing once more for the home of his childhood, he proposed to her to return with him and help him to rebuild its shattered altars. But she only laughed at his absurdity in even dreaming of such a thing; being too entirely wedded to the life she was living to think of changing it voluntarily.

"Go to the country," she would say, "Mon Dieu! désirez-vous briser mon cœur? if you would have change of place, there is but one change I will make; take me to Paris, charmante, ravissante Paris; oh! that would be Heaven." Then she would clasp her little hands, and sigh as devoutly for her paradise on earth, as rapt saint ever sighed for their

Heaven of love in the skies.

She had left Paris when little more than a child; but its bewildering memories lingered with her still, and she looked forward to her return as a pilgrim to his Mecca.

In this, as in everything else where she cared to make the effort, she had her own way. Husband and father soon yielded to her wishes; the latter against his will; for years before, on quitting France, much as he loved her, in the bitterness of an exile's wrath he had sworn never to return. True, in his loyal and patrician heart, he had loved but little better, that "many headed monster thing," for which the people cried, "Vive la République;" but he could not forgive the usurpation that to his mind seemed basely treacherous, and to foreign lands, carried his grief and his rebellion.

In Paris for six months, Mrs. St. George had led the gayest and most frivolous of lives. Admitted to the "beau monde," by right of birth, beauty and fortune, in its charmed circle she reigned a bright, particular star. Her days and nights were a round of giddy pleasures. Balls, fétes and operas seemed to her to be alone worth living for, and the delicate woman was far more untiring than the husband and father she led so relentlessly in her train.

Mr. St. George had long ceased to reproach her, knowing how futile would be all his efforts to make her comprehend what the woman should be, who could fill his life with a rich completeness.

But her father would say to her:

"Réné, my child, you are mad; have you no deeper thoughts than of pleasures like these, that

fade in an hour? You are both a wife and mother, why cannot your God given duties, win you from such lightness? Have you no soul to be saved, no fear of that day when you shall stand in the presence of the Most High, to give an account of the life you have misspent here, disregarding all sacred obligations?"

For all such disapprobation, tears were Réné St. George's ready and powerful weapon. She would weep bitterly, not from the faintest touch of remorse or repentence, but from the feeling that he had pained her unnecessarily. He loved her so well, that he could not endure to witness her grief, and would kiss away the tears, and leave her as hopelessly bent on the "pleasures that pall."

It was thus her giddy thoughtless life went on, until death claimed the one, who had been to her, both father and mother. Least of all, she could spare him from her life. At the loss of both husband and child she would have grieved far less. For him her sorrow seemed terrible; like a stricken animal she mourned, without hope or capacity for consolation.

Selfish even in her grief, she would cry:

"O, Mon Dieu! je suis désolé, il m'aimíe et ma vie fait un songe de plaisir. Maintenant il est mort ayez, pitie, O, Mon Dieu!"

But selfish as it was Harold St. George was glad to have evidence of even that much soul. For, many times in the years that had passed, recalling old legends of a mystic people, who had lived upon the earth, and especially that ideal creation of this fa-

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bled race, "Donatella" in the "Marble Faun;" to whose gay, glad life, her own bore such analogy dark, dreadful thoughts would come to him, that it might be possible for the fair woman, to whom he was chained for life, to be one of those soulless beings, capable only of the joys and sorrows of animal existence. But in calmer and wiser moments, both reason and God's revelation taught him, that this could not be true, and that she was only one of the many who go laughing and dancing through life, to the sound of merriest music, their motto ever, "Let us enjoy while we may," and having no more thought for the morrow than the beasts of the field, or the birds of the air.

Paul de Beausenante had been in his grave scarce a year, when his daughter plunged again into her old life, with, if possible, more recklessness than ever before. But in some way it failed to bring her its wonted pleasures; she soon grew weary of it all, and sighing for change, her husband, obedient still to her wish, took her to Nice, Baden Baden, Rome, Florence, London, everywhere that her capricious fancy could suggest.

But she was never the same anymore, and seemed pining always for her loved and lost. Day by day, Mr. St. George saw that she was becoming more fragile, and that the wan face grew paler and paler; until at last one fair June day, he laid her tenderly by her father's side in "Pére le Chaise;" believing that if she could have chosen freely, she would have preferred death beside the one she had loved best on earth, to life with him, or any other.

"But for my persistent folly in wooing her," he would think, remorsefully, "she might have some day loved and wedded, one altogether suited to her, who might have perfected the life, that with all her father's love and my own, was only half complete. But she is gone now, and with her all the rich possibilities of her undeveloped nature; and oh, my God! forgive me if I have left unsaid or undone, aught that could have guided her immortal soul to life and light.

"You have been kind to me, Harold, ah! so very kind, and the little Réné will repay you; she will love you, even as I have loved my father."

These were Réné St. George's last words to her husband. Then, like a tired child, her eyelids closed, and she slept that dreamless sleep from which there is no waking on this side of the tomb.

The peaceful, flower-like death, did not console her sorrowing husband, for the absence of all holy thoughts or immortal longings; and over the beautiful inanimate clay, he wept the bitterest tears of his life.

Having missed the keynote of her heart he had thought himself powerless to interfere with the life she had chosen. But when it was too late, he remembered only the sunny-hearted woman, who had seemed never to outgrow the innocent gayety of childhood, and who, with all her frivolity and mad pursuit of pleasure, had done no evil, and of the whole world, thought kindly; and the feeling relentlessly pursued him, that it might have been different had he been more courageous.

Very soon he left Paris, a sadder if not a wiser man, and after two years' wandering with his only child, had once more sought his native land and the home so long abandoned. But one day, after his arrival, Clare Vivien's bird-like voice had charmed him to her presence. The rest we know.

Chester Vivien's life, to a great extent, had been what he had himself made it; not half so sad as the younger man's, but if possible more a mockery. From his father who, (dying when at the head of a large commercial house,) he inherited both name and fortune. It being his father's wish that his son should take the place in the firm so long filled by himself, Chester Vivien made the effort; but being a dreamer always, and far more a scholar than a merchant, month after month he saw his father's hard-earned wealth, like shifting sand, pass rapidly from him, until at the ladder's lowest round he stopped, giddy and breathless with his misfortunes.

At twenty-one he had married a gay and beautiful widow with an only child, a girl of three or four years. She had helped him spend his fortune with lavish prodigality; but when she saw with him, that only a remnant of it remained, more practical than he, from that hour she took the reins in her own hands, and by courage and perseverance won a comfortable livelihood for her family from the wreck. Mr. Vivien's business settled up, they went at once to Olney, and took possession of the old farm house, where, during the life-time of his aunt, he had passed many happy hours.

When they arrived, they found Joseph and Mar-

garet Hardy had charge of the farm. These faithful servants of their aunt were so closely identified with Claremont, that they seemed almost as much a legacy to them as the farm itself, and they of course retained them. The place had been named by Miss Vivien in remembrance of another and dearer home, which bore her mother's maiden name. Chester Vivien's young daughter had also a portion of this name, that to the Viviens was revered and sacred. Truly, no home could have suited their changed fortunes better. The house was older than the village itself, and was built by the first millowner and founder of Olney.

Mr. Vivien was too great a student to be a really practical farmer, but having considerable mechanical genius, he had invented several really valuable agricultural implements; and at the time we write of was engaged in something more ambitious than he had yet attempted—the effort to both light and heat his house with the same fluid, by a method which he said that he had been maturing in his mind for years, but had never gotten quite perfect enough for patenting. To this, and to his books, the greater part of his spare time was devoted.

He had always been a kind and tender father to his only child; and having been her sole instructor, her education was of course somewhat erratic, but for all that, none the less thorough, she knowing well whatever he had attempted to teach her. It was well that the tie between father and child was so close and tender, for the mother had little heart left for her, being so entirely absorbed in her beau-

tiful darling, Maud Tremaine, the child of her first marriage. With the unerring instincts of childhood, Clare Vivien had perceived and grown up with the knowledge, that she had small place in her mother's heart, and had learned to comfort herself with the certainty that she was everything to the father she loved.

Maud Tremaine was educated in the convent of Le Sacre Cœur in Paris, but after returning to America, attended for more than a year a finishing school in New York. She was a remarkably fine linguist, speaking two or three different languages with the purest accent, conversed fluently, and danced like a fairy; and the aunt by whom she was educated, felt perfectly satisfied that her money had been well expended. Mrs. Duerson was Mr. Tremaine's sister, a widow with ample means, fond of travel, and devoted to society. She was very proud of her brilliant niece, and being a zealous Catholic, had brought her up in her own religion, and left nothing undone that could win the young girl's affection; but in some way she failed to supplant the mother, who, in her far-off home, pining always for her absent child. Interest in that child's welfare, sustained the mother in these long absences, and self-interest and the love of pleasure was the chain which bound her daughter to the generous benefactress with whom she was then abroad; and Mr. St. George had to renew acquaintance with only one more member of the family, Mrs. Vivien, who entered soon after he was seated, and gave him a cordial welcome. She was a stately,

handsome woman, and but little changed since he had seen her last. Chester Vivien was more pleased to welcome this friend of his boyhood to his quiet home, than he would have been the proudest magnate in the land. Harold St. George's love and confidence, when a gay, light-hearted boy, was one of the treasured memories of his life; and, indeed, all that seemed brightest and best in that life, was intricately blended with these memories of the sunny haired boy he had loved so well.

"You are the very same, Harold," he said, after talking a few moments with his friend; "the very same, grown a little older, that is all; anywhere upon earth I should have known you."

The warm glow of the pleasure he felt in this unexpected meeting, flushed his cheeks, and brightened his eyes, until he looked almost as young as the man sitting before him. Although he was in reality but four years older than Harold St. George, ordinarily he looked fifteen. Clare sat silently listening to them as they talked. She saw her father's eager, unwonted delight, and that her mother, too, unbent from her usual frigid calm, and was the sweetest and most gracious of women; and she thought, "What manner of man can he be, to so move from all their ordinary ways both my father and mother?"

She looked at him long and intently, and thought him as handsome as fancy ever pictured the fabled sun-god, and of as royal mien. But her father loved and honored him beyond all men, and she was so loyal-hearted that this knowledge alone could lend such glamour to her eyes, as to make her incapable of justly judging him. None the less, from that hour in her young heart, she enshrined him a hero, and king among men.

At last, when he arose to take leave of them, as in a dream, she heard her father ask,

"Have you come home to stay, Harold, or are you still a wandering spirit?"

She listened, dreading she knew not why, what she might hear. In a voice of inexpressible sadness he answered,

"Yes, I have come home to stay; at least, that is my intention now. The world has used me a little roughly, Chester, and, in truth, no where on its broad limits have I found any place like home."

Then turning to Mrs. Vivien with a smile, he said,

"I would be glad, madam, if you would permit your daughter to accompany me home, that she may become acquainted with mine."

"Your family are with you, then," Mrs. Vivien said, with some surprise, as she had inferred from his conversation that he had come home in advance of them.

"Oh, yes," he replied; "and I fear that my daughter will feel for some time, quite lonely. I know that it will give her great pleasure if I can present to her so charming a friend." And he smiled benignly into Clare's dark eyes.

"Yes, certainly, Clare will go with pleasure," Mrs. Vivien answered, courteously; and glancing reprovingly at her daughter, she added:

"If you will permit her to change her dress."

"Of course, if it is necessary; but I find no fault in this," he said, giving a hasty good natured glance at the blushing girl, and remembering her morning escapade with a little amusement, was surprised that she was not even less presentable.

Clare involuntarily looked down at her dress, and for the first time discovered that it was not only crumpled and soiled, but that her rather hoydenish adventure had left rents, that with strangers, would be anything but her passport for neatness. She was not usually very shy, but for some unaccountable reason, felt so then, and it cost some effort to say as she left the room, "I will detain you but a few moments."

True to her word she did re-appear very soon, arrayed in fresh muslin, brightened by rose colored ribbons; a narrow piece twined once or twice around her finely shaped head; peeping out here and there, through the short, waving dark hair. Simple as was her attire, she was looking her very best, and she knew it; but he only thought, as he looked his approval, "There is great strength and character in her face, and some day she will make a charming woman."

When once more in the open air and free from all restraint, it was not long before she was her old frank self again; and delighted the world weary man with her freshness, naivete and originality.

## CHAPTER III.

THE ST. GEORGES.

"Aucun chemin de fleurs ne conduit a la gloire."
—LA FONTAINE.

THE St. Georges were descended from an Eng-I lishman of noble birth, who in colonial days, finding this secluded and romantic spot, on the most elevated ground in the vicinity, the very top of a frowning cliff which overhung the-river, built what he evidently hoped would prove, not only a refuge and asylum for himself, but for his descendants from generation to generation. And after more than a century had passed, we could see that time had nowhere marred its grand proportions, but only darkened the massive stone walls, and rendered more perfect the illusion, that we were in the old world, and stood in the shadow of a turreted and battlemented castle. To right and left of it the ground sloped gradually away, and the ascent from either of these directions was quite easy; but not far in the rear was a deep ravine, and beyond it rose another frowning cliff. The lawn in front extended to the very edge of an abrupt declivity, and there, stone stairways led down to the river.

These cliffs, the twin upheaval of their mother earth, had long been known as Olney Heights, from a romantic, half forgotten legend, of a fair young maiden who bore that name, having made from one of them, a fearful leap into eternity, when flying from terrors greater than those she met. For this legend, and the cliffs it named, the first St. George called the noble home he had constructed, and almost a generation later, a man of enterprise and commercial ability, founded the village below and named it Olney, in honor of this home of the St. Georges.

The last three of them who had been masters at Olney Heights, when come to man's estate were little better than "bon vivants," living merrily for the pleasures of the hour. Brilliantly gifted to little purpose, and spending their substance freely; hotheaded, impulsive, but generous even to a foe, dying, each one of them left their inheritance more and more diminished. But they were beloved, and deeply mourned by the people among whom they had lived; and whatever evil they might have done, was forgiven and forgotten.

Only one of them, Harold St. George's father, lived to even middle life. He was the eldest of three sons, the first time in the history of the family there had ever been more than one; although there had been daughters, who were always handsomely portioned; but the landed estate remained intact, and passed from father to son.

At this time the estate being already greatly impoverished, it was decided by the father's last will and testament, that when the youngest son came of age, it should be divided; Olney Heights and considerable property surrounding it, to be the portion of the oldest son, and the remainder to be divided

equally between the mother and the two younger sons. But both of these died young; and with a broken heart, their mother soon followed them.

Thus at twenty-one, Gaston St. George found himself sole heir to all that remained of a once splendid fortune; and to the last day of his life he spent it royally.

At twenty-five he married a rarely gifted and beautiful woman, who transmitted to her son those qualities of heart and mind that in the St. Georges had become degenerate and well-nigh extinct. Unhappily for Gaston St. George's spiritual and temporal welfare, her life was as brief as it was noble; but when at last he was passing from a world he had found such delight in, with no power to bequeath to his only child the sacred inheritance of his race, he did not appeal to those high qualities in vain, when he implored his son to restore to the St. Georges all that his own, and his father's prodigality had so madly and wilfully lost. Harold St. George had faithfully kept his promise to the dead, and that day as he approached his ancestral home, its proud possessor, might well be pardoned some glow of pride in the brain and will, that had wrenched it from fortune and the grasp of fate itself.

Clare had found so much to say to him, that they reached Olney Heights before she had even thought to ask him of the family, whose acquaintance she had come to make; then it was too late, for before they were half way up the avenue, a little girl came bounding towards them and exclaimed in a sweet

childish voice, as Mr. St. George took her in his arms,

"O, mon pére! j'a'été si triste, si tres triste; je

suis bien aise que vous avez venu."

"Réné, my child," Mr. St. George said, "this is Clare Vivien, a young friend I have brought to see you; if you will love her she will make it less sad for you."

Released from her father's arms, Réné stood looking up into Clare's face for a moment in silence, then said gravely,

"I wish you were not so tall—, but I shall love you, I know."

Clare bent down impulsively and kissed the little

fairy who had prophesied so sweetly.

"They will be friends, and Réné could not have a better," thought Mr. St. George, complacently, as he watched the two walking hand in hand and chatting gaily.

They soon came up to the bonne, who mademoiselle, in her impatience to meet her father, had left. She was seated in the shade of a tree that bordered the avenue.

"Celestine," the little girl said as they approached her, "voyez-vous la jeune demoiselle qu' est etre ma bonne amie; et j' ai l'intention d' ell' aimer."

Rising to her feet, the French woman welcomed the young girl politely and pleasantly. She was devotedly attached to her little charge, having filled the place of nurse and almost of mother to her from babyhood, and was prepared to regard with favor any one who would be able to contribute to Réné's pleasure. From pure love for her, and deep respect for the master she served, she had been engaged in the difficult task of acquiring the English language, it being Mr. St. George's wish that she should speak it with his child, for reasons best known to himself. Like her mother, although speaking English well, in all moments of strong feeling or excitement, she invariably used French, as if by so doing, she were better able to express herself completely. It was not strange that to him it was the language of pain, and while in his heart the wish was not acknowledged, that his daughter might forget the tongue her mother had loved so well; nevertheless it was there, and this instruction to the faithful bonne was the first evidence of it.

When they reached the house, Mr. St. George led the way to the library, a spacious, lofty room, that had been renovated and made comfortable as his temporary sitting room. On the walls hung numerous portraits of dead and gone St. Georges; a grand piano stood in one corner of the room, and on either side were huge cases lined with books that were the collection of years.

This was not Clare's first introduction to Olney Heights, for having been always a favorite of Annetta's, she had been from childhood familiar with every nook and corner of the grand old house, from its loftiest tower chamber to its deepest cellar.

"I suppose you have been here often?" Mr. St. George said, questioningly, a twinkle of amusement in his eyes. She caught the drift of his thoughts at once, and answered with perfect good humor:

"You judge that I have, no doubt, by the freedom with which you found me appropriating your fruit."

"O, not at all!" he replied; "but as you have grown up in the neighborhood, nothing could be more natural than for you to have been."

She was beginning to wonder why no other members of the family made their appearance, and after an awkward pause, putting her arm around the little girl, who stood looking up at her, she asked:

- "Have you no other children, Mr. St. George?"
- "No; Réné is my only child."
- "And your wife-where is she?"
- "My wife is dead," he answered gravely. In the starry eyes that were lifted to his, there was such tender compassion, that it thrilled him as no outspoken pity could. For, although the lips did not say, I am sorry for you, he read in the beautiful eyes a far more eloquent sympathy. She felt just as she looked, but by no means knew that she was looking as she felt. And he was thinking, "Alas! it is terrible to live alone; this child makes me pity myself."

"I am going to take the young lady to see my pets, mon pére," Réné said, breaking the silence.

"Call me Clare. I shall not know who you mean if you say young lady."

"I like the name, and I shall always call you that," Réné said, repeating it in her musical voice.

When they were out of the house, she led the way to a large conservatory where both mocking birds and canaries were in hanging cages; then on to the barn-yard, and showed Clare the particular

fowls that she had already chosen for pets, having made a tour of inspection early in the morning with her father.

When they returned to the house, they found Mr. St. George at the piano, playing the accompaniment and singing, in a fine tenor voice, "the flower song" from "Faust." They approached softly and Clare joined him with her clear, pure soprano. From that song they went to another and another, and were singing still when the lunch bell rang.

Mr. St. George got up, and looking down at her, said:

"Do you know, my child, that you are a genius? Who has taught you to sing like this?"

"I have never had very much instruction," she answered, timidly, embarrassed by the approbation she saw was genuine.

"Your voice is a treasure, and it should be cultivated," he said, warmly.

"I am going to Madam Campinal's in New York, after Christmas, and shall spend a year or two there, principally for instruction in music and the training of my voice."

"I am glad that you are," he replied, feeling really interested in her welfare.

But she was unreasonable enough to be somewhat piqued, and thought he might have the grace to feel a little sorry for her going, if only for Réné's sake.

Mr. St. George was such a charming host, and so determined upon her having a happy day, that she

soon forgot all minor grievances, and was merry and joyous as even he could wish.

After lunch they played croquet, and finally wandered down to the boat-house at the foot of the cliff, and Mr. St. George, who was a fine oarsman, took them out on the river for an hour or two. Time flew on such wings of pleasure, that it was near sunset when Clare started homeward, with Mr. St. George for escort. When they reached the gate he excused himself from entering, by saying it was his dinner hour and he must return.

"You must let me thank you for the very happiest day of all my life," she said, impulsively, a glory of enthusiasm in the young, upturned face.

And looking out at the crimson sunset, rather than at him, continued, dreamily:

"When we were gliding swiftly over the blue water, I was so happy that I could not bear to think that it would all end, as it must, and does—." She stopped with a sigh.

Mr. St. George was touched by her ingenuous frankness, and said, quickly:

"Do not say ended! for to-morrow it can be continued, and every day that you wish. I intend to make large demands upon your time, and in return shall try to have it pass pleasantly. Good-by, until to-morrow," and making rapid strides he was soon out of sight.

As her eyes followed his vanishing form she thought, "how different he is from every one else, and how happy I am that I know him."

# CHAPTER IV.

### YOUNG LOVE.

"The light of love, the purity of grace,
The mind, the music breathing from her face,
The heart whose softness harmonized the whole,
And oh! that eye was in itself a soul."

—Byron.

AY after day Mr. St. George presented himself at Claremont, and it soon became an established fact, that Clare was to devote the greater part of her time before going away to Réné and himself. The child seemed to adore her, and when she was compelled to leave her, was always restless and impatient until her return.

Mr. St. George, as he said himself, was taking a grand holiday, and had nothing to do but devote himself to them.

As long as the weather remained pleasant, he took them every day rowing; and they played all kinds of out-door games and rode horseback. Clare was an accomplished equestrienne, and had long astonished the good people of Olney and the surrounding country by her daring exploits.

The one luxury that Mr. Vivien had been able to indulge in for his daughter's pleasure, was a black Arabian mare, imported with several others, by a man whose friendship had followed him even to adversity. Clare had trained her to do almost every-

thing but talk to her. Being very fleet and almost as sure footed as a mountain chamois, it was not strange that mounted upon her, without any thought of harm, her fearless young rider had been able to perform feats, that to the villagers and neighbors, seemed like reckless tempting of Providence. Some of them had gone so far as to remonstrate with her parents, and they in turn had reprimanded her. But Clare always made answer, "that there was not the least danger, and beside, if she could not ride as pleased her best, she did not care to ride at all," and this for the time would hush all remonstrance.

Having had few playmates the neighbors knew little of her, and shook their heads significantly as she passed them swiftly. "She has been a strange child always, and will, I fear, never die in her bed," they would say to each other.

Only three months before Mr. St. George's return, she had convalesced from a long and terrible illness, in which her feet had touched the border of the silent land. Long and tedious had been her return to health and strength, and even then, her wan face, cropped hair, and attenuated form, were evidences of the fearful struggle she had had with the grim monster, "Death."

Mr. Vivien had been deeply anxious, fearing that her health was gone forever. For when not riding, like one in a dream, she would mope through the long summer days, utterly unlike the glad, impulsive, frolicsome child she had been of old.

At last she was changed; he saw it, and his heart delighted in the knowledge. In all that she did,

new zeal was evident; once more life seemed a something to live, and not to dream away.

She was conscious of the change, and was perfectly frank with herself in acknowledging the source of her life's renewal.

For some reason scarcely defined to herself, unless it was the feeling that he would not approve, she had never taken any of her daring rides when with Mr. St. George, and he had admired extravagantly the beautiful highbred animal that Clare loved so tenderly, without knowing anything of her wonderful capacities.

As the autumn merged into winter, their out-door sports were abandoned, and music and various kinds of in-door games took their place.

Mr. St. George and his daughter spent much of their time at Claremont, and those days when they could not (if Clare did not make her appearance at the Heights), never failed to send for her; and, truth to tell, she was nothing loth to go, for she had not only become tenderly attached to the little Réné, but in her ardent, impulsive young heart there was the most passionate worship for Réné's father. Not that she had ever analyzed the feeling, or even thought much about it. She only knew that she was happy and content when with him, and never quite either when away from him.

Mr. St. George, notwithstanding her sixteen years, regarded her as an innocent and most engaging child, who in a few months had become strangely dear to him. He knew that she was a genius in embryo, and felt that there were latent depths in her nature,

whose vibrant chords a master hand would one day touch, and bring forth such marvelous sweetness as rarely blesses a man's life. That he was that master hand, he neither thought, nor hoped.

One day when he had been detained longer than usual on his estate, he entered the library and found both Réné and Clare. The former, tired out from play, was lying asleep on a sofa, carefully covered; and beside her, Clare sat reading. When Mr. St. George entered she looked up with a bright smile of welcome, and closed her book.

"What have you been reading, my dear?" he asked, taking the book from her hand.

"Titan!" he said, with a little surprise, "do you like it?"

"Yes indeed! so much that I have read it twice. Last summer I read a good many of Jean Paul's works; my father has all of them. I think they suited my mood then, better than any books I know of, could have done. The dreamy, exquisite beauty of his imagery; his weird and wonderful denouments, and the mystic and lofty purity of his heroes and heroines, all combine to waft my spirit to thought's highest and purest realm. To me, always since I have known anything of his writings, Richter has seemed a being set apart, too purely spiritual and unpractical for earth; and yet, with enough of the passions that are human, to unfit him for the skies."

Seeing then the deep earnestness of his glance,

she flushed, and stopped abruptly.

"You surprise me greatly," he said, after a moment's pause, still looking into her eloquent eyes. "You have read more, and thought more, than I have dreamed of."

Then seating himself beside her, he asked numerous questions as to the books she had read, and which she had like best. Her self confidence regained, they were soon engaged in an animated discussion of the merits of different authors. He was amazed to find in one so young, a taste so highly cultivated; and that her reading with the exception of law, had been almost as varied and extensive as his own.

"You are a wonderful child," he said softly, and laying his hand tenderly on the dark, clustering hair; "but, my dear, you have been reading, when you should have been playing; these wan cheeks are no longer a mystery."

She shook his hand from her head impatiently, and answered a little haughtily:

"I am not a child; in a week or two I will be sixteen; and a long illness, and not reading, has caused my pallor."

He was amused by her impetuous repudiation, and laughed outright, which did not mend matters very much.

- "I see you don't like to be thought a child, Clare; but as I did not know that you were so very aged, you must forgive me," he said, looking good naturedly into the mutinous young face.
- "I do not care to be misjudged," she replied with dignity. "I am not a child, in either years, thought, or feeling; and, in fact, in nothing, unless it be in my sympathy with childhood."

The grave intensity of her voice, as much as the words, thrilled him deeply, and aroused him for the first time to the consciousness, that in many things, she had indeed left childhood far behind her. He looked long and intently at the downcast face.

"How she will love some day; God help her, if it be unwisely;" he thought, and felt something like

a pang of envy for the visionary man.

She was so long silent that Mr. St. George leaned towards her, took in his one little reluctant hand, and said, gently and questioningly:

"You are not offended with me, Clare?"

"Offended, oh, no!" she answered, looking up brightly, and feeling not a little ashamed of her petulance; "it would take far more than that from you, to really offend me."

She was so winsome in her naive ingenuousness; that, to this worshiper of beauty, she seemed almost beautiful.

"What will Réné and I do when you are gone, Clare?" he asked.

A shadow passed swiftly over the dark, wistful face, and as he looked into the fathomless eyes, they grew dim with unshed tears; but she answered with only a slight tremor in her voice:

"I do not know, I am sure, but I hope that you

will miss me."

"Miss you, little one; those are not the words," he said, far more tenderly than he was aware of, "for do you know," he continued, "that I am selfish enough to have the wish in my heart, to deprive you of the rich opportunities this absence will afford,

—and if I were capable of teaching you all that you ought to know, you should not go. As it is, I have not quite made up my mind that you can," he finished in a masterful way; still holding her hand and looking down into the glowing face. In that moment he was not far from loving her, and she had the wild wish in her heart, that he would in some way, force her to remain.

"For nothing that I can learn," she thought, "will ever repay me for the anguish it will cost to leave him."

But she answered him nothing, being stilled into silence, by a tumult of feeling, that although deeply moved himself, he did not dream of.

Rising, he walked up and down the room with some impatience, and the noise of his footsteps awakened the sleeping child. She got up and lifting her little rosebud mouth to be kissed, asked sweetly:

"M'aimez-vous, ma chérie?" and for all answer, Clare took her in her arms, kissed her tenderly, and saying that she must go home, rose and tied on her hat. As usual, Mr. St. George and Réné accompanied her, but to-day he declined to go in, feeling somewhat distrait, yet hardly knowing why.

To Clare, life was all couleur de rose, that afternoon, and she entered the house with such unusual elation of spirit, that her father, to whom she went first, did not fail to observe it. He had been watching her intently of late, and as she went out of the room, in search of her mother, and after a moment or two returned to it again, all the while singing softly in a glad, sweet voice, he could not

help wondering at the change, and when she came up to him and laid her arms gently around his neck, he said questioningly:

"Something has given my birdie unusual pleasure?"

But he was not prepared for the red flush, that in an instant dyed both cheek and brow. Making him no answer she hid her face on his bosom.

"You are a strange child, and past all finding out," he said at last; "but I am too happy to see you growing into your old bright self once more, to quarrel with any little peculiarities."

"Where is mother?" she asked, after a long silence; "I could not find her."

"She has gone to the village to make some purchases. By the way, she received a letter from your sister Maud this morning, saying that she would be here to-morrow afternoon."

Clare had known for a week or two that her sister was once more in New York; but it was so unusual and unexpected a thing, for her to be willing to exchange the gayeties of the city, at that season of the year, for their quiet country home, that she was struck with dismay. She did not think her actuated by any desire to see her family, for she believed Maud Tremaine incapable of even the most commonplace of affections.

"Why does she come?" Clare asked, with such evident disquietude, that Mr. Vivien answered in a tone of grave reproach:

"To see us, my child, of course. Will you not be glad to see your sister?"

"No, I will not," she replied, frankly. "I can love her better in New York, or anywhere else, than I can here, for I was never happy an hour with her in my life."

Mr. Vivien was shocked, and while in his heart he did not quite approve of his beautiful stepdaughter's imperious ways, he felt that it would not do to let this outbreak pass without reproof, and in a sad voice said:

"I am sorry, my darling, to hear you speak, and to know that you feel like this. Remember, Maud Tremaine is your mother's own daughter. She is so beautiful, and has been petted and spoiled all her life; but I feel confident that she will grow out of her vain, frivolous ways, and that the natural nobility of her character will assert itself."

"I am sorry to have pained you, father," the young girl said, with a touch of remorse, "and I trust you are right in your hopes for Maud Tremaine; but none the less, I would prefer her to undergo the metamorphose somewhere else."

"You are going away so soon, my dear, that she cannot trouble you long," Mr. Vivien said.

She gave a quick gasp. That was true. It was strange that she had not thought of it before. She clasped and unclasped her hands nervously, completely overcome by the horrors of the situation.

"I am going away," she thought, "to leave Harold St. George to the mercy of this beautiful and heartless woman. But she may love him, and if she does, then, oh, my God! he will be lost to me forever. She is so beautiful that no man can resist her."

These thoughts tortured and almost maddened her. She fell upon her knees before her father and sobbed out,

"I cannot, oh, I cannot go away; it would break my heart or drive me mad."

Seeing that Mr. Vivien was both grieved and surprised, she said:

"Do not look so, dear father; I only wish to stay at home, and I do not care to learn more than you can teach me."

Then twining her arms closely about him as he sat, she lifted her face up nearer to his, and said, pleadingly:

"You were not wont to refuse anything to your little Clare, father, and this is the one wild heartwish she has ever made to you."

He was deeply moved and deeply wondering.

"What can you mean, my child?" he asked. "Only a few months since, and you were far more anxious to go than I to have you. Why this change?"

Receiving no answer, he continued:

"I should think that, entertaining the feelings you say you do for your half-sister, you would rejoice at this chance of escape."

It was so impossible for her to make it plain to him, but she repeated again and again, tears streaming from her eyes,

"Oh! do not send me away father, do not send me away!" At last he took her up tenderly and said comfortingly,

"You shall stay, my child, if I can obtain your mother's consent."

"And will you promise to beg for it?" she asked

eagerly.

"Yes, I promise," he answered a little sadly, thinking, no doubt, that his own influence in that quarter had often very little weight. But at any rate the promise served to soothe and quiet the stormy, passionate heart of his child, and that was very much to Chester Vivien.

When his wife returned, she was so much occupied with preparations for her expected daughter, that he said nothing to her on the subject, and again quieted Clare, who was wandering about the house, restless and miserable, with the assurance that the first fitting opportunity he would have it all settled.

About ten o'clock, Mr. St. George called, and asked Clare if she would not go home with him and see two pictures that had just arrived. She consented, and while putting on her hat and cloak, Mrs. Vivien entered the parlor and, after chatting pleasantly for a few moments, told Mr. St. George that she was expecting her older daughter in the afternoon, and that she would be glad to have him call.

The truth was, Miss Tremaine's sudden return was a preconcerted arrangement of the mother's, that the young lady should take advantage of the situation, and secure this stray and altogether eligible prize. With her quick eyes, she had detected his growing fondness for her younger child, and thought,

"If Clare, with her plainness, can win him, what might not Maud do?" and the latter she was far more anxious to see settled in life. She knew that only a rich man would suit her, and felt that this was the one chance to keep her darling near her. As to Clare, she believed a far humbler and poorer man, could make her just as happy, if she chanced to fancy him. That she did fancy Mr. St. George, she knew very well; but to do the mother justice, she thought that Clare was only a child, far too young to be Mr. St. George's wife, and that a year or two of absence would completely cure her of any such attachment.

She wrote to her daughter, stating all the necessary facts concerning this "brilliant opportunity," as she knew very well that unless she gave her some strong motive for coming at that season of the year, she could never be induced to do so. The young lady was a long time replying; but her mother waited patiently, and at last a letter was received, announcing her coming. As Mrs. Vivien saw Clare and Mr. St. George walk off together, she thought,

"I have put everything in readiness for her coming, and if she does not succeed it will be her own fault."

As ill luck to his success would have it, that very morning Mr. Vivien proposed to his wife that Clare should not go away to school, and met with such unusual and violent opposition, that after one or two fruitless appeals, the poor man yielded, knowing well that he was powerless to change her purpose,

and feeling a world of yearning sympathy for his child. For, although he did not comprehend her motive in wishing so intensely to remain, that she did wish it was quite enough to make him wish it too.

# CHAPTER V.

## A DANGEROUS CIRCE.

"A worthless woman; mere cold clay,
As all false things are; but so fair,
She takes the breath of men away,
Who gaze upon her unaware."

-Mrs. Browning.

WHEN Clare and Mr. St. George entered the library at Olney Heights, she saw that two more portraits had been added to the already large number.

"Those are the pictures I wished you to see," Mr. St. George said, pointing to them.

She advanced nearer and saw that one of them was the portrait of a woman, beautiful and young; more beautiful she thought, than human face could be. For a moment, she almost held her breath with reverent awe, before this miracle of perfectness; then turning to Mr. St. George, asked softly,

- "Do you think any one could ever have looked like that?"
- "Oh, yes!" he answered gravely, "it is a fine likeness of my wife."
- "Your wife," she said, startled out of all selfcontrol; looking first at him and then at the pictured face, "I thought it was an artist's dream."

Motionless, she stood gazing at the picture; all her soul shining through her eyes.

"Is my little Clare then, so great a worshiper of beauty?" he asked gently.

She did not answer him; in fact was not aware that he had spoken, so utterly was she absorbed, in the picture, and the thoughts that it had brought to her. Almost unconsciously she murmured, "She was so beautiful, so rarely beautiful, that I do not marvel that you loved her."

There was such yearning sadness, in the luminous upturned eyes, that he had the wish to take her in his arms and comfort her, as he would a sorrowing child; although by no means comprehending the source of her sorrow.

"You have not looked at the other picture," he said; "it is an equally fine likeness of my wife's father."

She looked for the first time, and saw the portrait of a handsome man, in the prime of life, with grave tender eyes, and a mouth sweet as a woman's.

"I like his face," she said, looking at Mr. St. George, "but why is not your own picture there?"

"It seems fittest to me, that I should hang her father's beside hers," he answered, and a shadow of pain darkened his fine eyes.

Once more, as if from irresistible impulse she turned to the face of the lovely woman, "I have thought," she said at last, "that Maud Tremaine was beautiful; but her beauty is not to be compared to this—"

"By the way," Mr. St. George said, being reminded of it by the name, "your mother told me

this morning, that your sister would be here tonight, and asked me to come over and see her."

A cold smile curved the young girl's perfect lips.

"You will go of course," she said, in such a strained unnatural voice, that he was all at sea, as to what she could be meaning.

"I would be churlish if I did not," he answered, "and beside, Clare, I shall be only too happy to know one so near and dear to you, as a sister."

She laughed, a silvery mocking laugh.

"It is not with me, as with the proverb, 'qui m'aime, aime mon chien,' for I shall demand less for my sister from one who cares for me, than a perhaps better person, has demanded for his dog."

She stopped, dismayed at her own bitterness, and he was more shocked than she had ever seen him.

- "You are not like yourself to-day, child; what is the matter?" he asked.
- "An evil spirit has entered my soul; I know it and feel it, but am powerless to resist," she answered impulsively.
- "Come then and let me help you to exorcise it." Taking her hand he led her to the piano, placed "Mendelssohn's Hunting Song," which they had been practicing together, before her, and said quietly,
- "We will have some music now." She commenced the accompaniment without a protest, and did very well, until she attempted to sing. Twice she failed, but each time, he urged her to try again. The third time she broke down altogether, and bow-

ing her head upon the piano, burst into violent sobbing.

All the time she had been trying to sing, these wild thoughts had been rioting in her brain:

"She was so beautiful and I am so plain, that he will never love me; she is so beautiful that he will love her; O, my God! why am I not beautiful?"

He was so unprepared for a demonstration like this, from one who had seemed always perfectly self-possessed, that he scarcely knew what to do. But he was deeply sorry for her, feeling that something must have occurred to grieve her terribly, as she had not been herself all the morning. Going up to her he laid his hand on her bowed head and said softly,

"Tell me what has grieved you, Clare, and let me help you bear it. You know, little one, how much I love you, and you must know, too, that it pains me to see you unhappy."

He was bending down very near her, and she felt his warm breath on her cheek. The musical voice and the tender words had found their way to her heart, and were stilling its wild tumults with their infinite sweetness.

"Oh! if I only dared tell him," she said, unconsciously aloud; and was surprised to hear him answer, gently:

"With me, dear, you can dare all things."

The madness of her desire appalled and filled her with shame.

"How could I ever tell him," she thought, "that I am miserable from the fear that he will never love me, because his wife was beautiful and I am not; because my sister is beautiful, and I am not."

After a few moments' perfect quiet, she took out her handkerchief, wiped her eyes, and getting up hastily, said:

"You must forget my weakness, for there is really nothing much the matter."

But this assurance did not satisfy him, and he drew her to him, and lifting gently the blushing, tear-stained face, asked, in the tenderest of voices:

"Are you sure that you have told me true, little one?"

Into those clear windows of the soul he could not look, or else he might have read its thrilling secret; but they were almost closed, and the tremulous mouth alone bore evidence of her deep emotion. A moment or two he held her so, looking fondly and intently at the young face, strangely moved and thrilled, yet scarcely knowing his own heart or its desires, and when she made an effort to free herself, let her go with a sigh, not wholly satisfied with himself that he did, and, yet, with no feeling sufficiently well defined to give him pain.

And so men will often come near to their one chance of happiness, and from mere lack of reaching forth their hands to grasp it, let it pass from them forever, and wander on unsatisfied to the end of their days.

Clare declined to stay to lunch, and insisted upon going home alone, prompted no doubt by some newly developed feeling of shyness, and when next they met two violet, velvet eyes were looking on; whose owner, with negligent grace, half reclined upon a divan, rolled near the fire for her ladyship's comfort.

Maud Tremaine had only arrived that afternoon; but she had made for the evening a careful toilet, having learned from her mother of the possibility of Mr. St. George's calling. An artist in her own make-up, if in nothing else, she knew to a nicety what would, and what would not, enhance her really wonderful beauty. To-night she affected simple elegance; a superbly-fitting black silk, with lace at the throat and a knot of bright ribbon.

As Mr. St. George entered the room and greeted the other members of the family, she rose languidly to an upright position, and when her mother presented him to her, acknowledged the introduction with the high-bred grace that is a natural gift to some, and is carefully studied by all women of fashion.

Mr. St. George had never thought anything about Miss Tremaine, although he had heard often of her; but however much he might have thought, he certainly would never have expected to see, in a New England farm house, any one like this matchlessly radiant woman, having that dazzling perfectness of face and form and coloring, that filled with amazement all who beheld her; and to this rare loveliness she had added every trick and charm, that could win man's worshiping heart.

Mr. St. George bowed low before her, and for a moment, spellbound, stood looking at her, as only a few hours before Clare had looked at that other and

fairer pictured face. When he took his seat near by her, something like a gleam of triumph shot from the long violet eyes.

Clare watched them through the whole evening, and thought she had never seen either of them so bewitching. They were so grandly beautiful, both blondes of the same rare and perfect type. But even as she saw and thought this, the young girl felt that there, all resemblance ended, and that the spirits which these fair caskets enshrined, were wide as the eternal seas apart.

"Yet he will love her; she mas wine! it, and he cannot resist her," she thought, and felt a greatpity for the man she loved, a shuddering horror of the days to come.

"Oh! God have mercy on both of us," was the

silent prayer of her tortured soul.

It was late when Mr. St. George asked Miss Tre-

maine if she played or sang.

"Indifferently well," the young lady replied.
"My sister, Clare, has inherited the musical gifts of the family."

"You can well spare them, Miss Tremaine," he

said, bowing blandly.

"To one who has nothing else," Clare added

icily, as if completing his sentence.

For the first time he remembered that he had spoken only once to her during the evening, and with a touch of remorse turned to where she was sitting, and said, reproachfully:

"You know I meant nothing of the kind, Clare;

come, let us have the 'Flower Song,' and then I will make my adieus."

"Not to-night, thank you; I do not care to

sing," she answered, coldly.

"She is jealous," thought the worldly wise woman. "And, what has been the matter all day with my usually light hearted little friend?" thought Mr. St. George, who after all these months of intimate acquaintance, had never once guessed a truth, which Miss Tremaine had grappled in a single evening.

Once more he turned to the fair woman whose loveliness enthralled him, as he had thought no woman's beauty could ever do again. All the sorcery that she was mistress of, she brought to bear upon him. Once or twice he attempted to go, and some witching word or tone, wooed him to remain.

"This is madness," he thought at last, and with one appealing glance at Clare, as if for help, tore him-

self away.

Through the long night, Harold St. George kept a lonely vigil in Olney Heights, and Clare kept one in her turret chamber; sleep came to neither. She sorrowed, not only for her own perishing hopes, but for the loved one who had started blindfold to his doom; and all that was highest and purest in the man, battled with that leaven of unrighteousness which had marred and wrecked all the years of his young manhood.

"I will never see her again," he thought wildly, "that fatal beauty would drive me mad; and I will sell my soul no more for any face, however fair."

Then stretching forth his hands, as if he indeed sought aid from her, he said aloud, "Oh! Clare, pure angel, be my guardian spirit, and save me if you can."

And still another vigil, but not a lonely one, was held far into the night; in which Maud Tremaine counseled her mother, that, for the successful maturing of their plans, it would be best for Clare Vivien to go at once. The mother divined her meaning, having already, as we have said, an intuition of the truth, and assured her that Clare would leave in a week or ten days at farthest.

This point settled, the beauty said complacently, "I am glad to find Mr. St. George worthy of my best efforts, and it will go hard with me, if I do not bring him soon to my feet."

"It will be your own fault, if you do not," the mother answered fondly, and she believed truly that it was not in human nature, at least in man's, to long resist that faultless loveliness.

Warning her daughter of the lateness of the hour, she kissed her good night and left her to seek her pillow; which she did and was soon asleep, troubled by no thought of breaking hearts, or remorse that her evil genius was triumphing ever, over all that was best and brightest in her nature.

# CHAPTER VI.

### THE SHADOWS OF FATE.

"He has cast

His shadow 'twixt me and the sun . . .let it pass!

My hate yet may find him!"

—OWEN MEREDITH.

WHEN morning dawned Clare was still miserable and awake; but the sleepless night did not prevent her appearing, as usual, at the breakfast table; looking a little paler, that was all. When breakfast was over, her mother asked her to go with her to her room; and when they had reached it, Mrs. Vivien said:

"I wish to tell you, my child, that you must be ready to leave for school the day after New Year's. I shall take you to New York, myself."

Clare almost shrieked, "Oh! mother, please let me stay. I do not wish to go away."

Mrs. Vivien lifted her eyebrows slightly, and asked with cold surprise, "Why this sudden reluctance to go?"

Despair lent her boldness, and she answered without a change of color:

"It is not sudden, mother, believe me; I have asked father if I might stay, and asked him to intercede with you; has he said nothing to you?"

"Yes! he spoke to me, and I answered him, as I will now answer you. At the time I have stated,

you will go; I know of nothing that will change this determination; since you have so little interest in your own advancement, I am compelled to be firm. Twice I have yielded to your father's entreaties, and left you to his instruction. I now believe it would have been better for you, had I sent you to school. You would at least know something beside climbing trees, and madcap riding. Your sister says, that after a whole year's absence, she can see no advancement, or improvement in you; at your age this is dreadful."

Into Clare's dark eyes, there flashed sudden fire, and the flush of anger dyed her face. Fierce words were on her tongue, but she remembered in time to suppress them, that it was her mother's idol of whom she would speak. Knowing that it would be useless to make another appeal to her, with an aching heart, she went for comfort to her father, and he, unhappily, was able to give but little.

He did, however, advise her to enlist Harold St. George in her behalf, and ask him to intercede with her mother, as he believed Mr. St. George would have more influence with her than any one else.

All day Clare watched for him anxiously. "He had seldom failed to come every day," she thought, "and surely he would not fail, now that he had seen her."

Yet come he did not, and through the long day and evening, she watched and waited for him in vain; and when morning came once more, thought it would bring him. But instead, a note came to her from him, saying that he was not very well, and

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asking her if she would please come over, as little Réné was wild to see her. She took the note to her father, told him that she was going, and it was not long before she made her appearance in the library at Olney Heights.

Mr. St. George was lying full length upon a sofa, making an effort to play dominoes with Réné.

When Clare entered he rose at once, and held out his hand, asking, as he looked smilingly down at the troubled young face:

"Don't you think I make an interesting invalid?"

She looked a little incredulous, but said nothing. Réné had already greeted the young girl rapturously, and then with both tiny arms, clung to her waist.

"The truth is, Réné and I could not do without our sunbeam any longer; and we had to have some excuse to send for her," Mr. St. George said pleasantly.

"Why then, did you not come and bring her as usual?" Clare asked, smiling for the first time.

She saw a subtle something pass over his face; but it was gone instantly, and he replied, in a tone somewhat graver than he had used before:

"You know my child that you are not alone now, and it would not be quite the same."

This was the only allusion he made to the newcomer during Clare's long visit, and she had so great a grief at her heart, that she did not marvel at, or even think of it.

The hours passed so swiftly, and pleasantly, that her visit had almost come to an end, before she found courage to confide her trouble to Mr. St. George, and ask his assistance. The knowledge that the day was actually set for her to leave, came to him like a blow.

"I cannot spare you, little one," he said so earnestly, that knowing nothing of the feeling which underlaid his words, her heart gave a bound of delight.

"Certainly I will go to your mother," he continued, "and leave nothing unsaid that might gain her consent. I will tell her that I will be your father's assistant instructor, and teach you all that I know, even to law; will that do?" he asked playfully, although in his heart he had very little taste for the task he was setting himself, much as he desired Clare to remain. For some instinct warned him that he would fail to convert Mrs. Vivien, and he dreaded to bear the news of his defeat to the anxious, unhappy child.

"At any rate I shall make the effort," he thought, "and if I win, Clare is made happy, and I, by her pure and tender friendship, perhaps saved from wild-

est folly."

"I shall not go home with you this afternoon," he said to Clare, who was ready to start, "but I know Réné would like to go."

The little girl clapped her hands with rapture at the suggestion, and rushed off for Celestine and her

wraps.

"I had no thought of taking an invalid home with me," Clare said, with perceptible amusement in her eyes. From the first she had had very little faith in his illness, but being so much happier from

having been sent for, could afford to humor the deception, whatever his motive might be.

Comprehending her amusement at once, he said, "You do not half believe that I am an invalid, Clare, and I am not quite sure that you more than half regret the loss of my company."

"You have furnished a delightful substitute; I cannot complain," she answered, smiling into his

questioning eyes.

As Réné came in equipped for the walk he said, "I shall be over to see your mother in a day or two, and in the meantime if you do not see me, know that I have not forgotten."

"I will trust you," she said simply, and bade him

good-by.

Réné spent the afternoon with her, and at sunset Celestine, and not her father, came to take her hôme.

"He is still playing invalid," Clare thought, wondering not a little at his whim. But when two or three more days had passed, and still he had not made his appearance, she was not the only one at Claremont who was restless and disturbed. Mrs. Vivien wondered at his unusual and prolonged absence, but beyond all, Miss Tremaine was perplexed and dismayed. She had been told that he was a daily visitor at the house before her coming. "Why then this sudden cessation of visits?" she asked herself.

She had been too long accustomed to reading men's minds and playing upon their sensitive heartstrings, to doubt that she had made upon him in that one evening, a profound impression.

"Is this indifference an acted part?" she thought, "perchance to elicit my attention. No, no!" She could not accept this motive, feeling intuitively that it was unworthy of Harold St. George; and when at last he did call and asked for her mother alone, her consternation was complete. If she had been living anywhere else but in America, she was quite vain enough to have believed that he had come to ask permission to woo her. As it was, she imagined every possible reason for his coming but the right one; and when after an hour Mrs. Vivien entered the room with flushed cheeks and flaming eyes, her daughter was wholly unprepared for the revelation she made.

She was so deeply indignant with Mr. St. George for his, as she termed it, impertinent interference, that it was some moments before she was able to give the gist of their interview. When she had done so, Maud asked the very pertinent question: "Do you not think, mamma, that this appeal to permit Clare to remain at home means something?"

"I confess I am not altogether satisfied with the indication; but worse than this, he told me, that not feeling very well a day or two ago, he sent for Clare to come to Olney Heights; she went, and it was then, no doubt, that she told Mr. St. George of my determination to take her away, and also her own bitter opposition to it. He spoke of her always as one speaks of a child, yet I am inclined to give him credit for more feeling than he pretends."

"What answer did you give him, mamma?"

"Why do you ask such a question, Maud? I answered that she must go, of course."

"Did he seem much discomfitted by it?"

"Well, yes, I think he did; I certainly never felt more deeply outraged with any one in my life; but I think I succeeded in convincing him that my decision was unalterable, without offending him."

"That was well," Miss Tremaine said, and shut

her small teeth fiercely.

Up and down the room she walked, again and again, as if collecting and concentrating thought; suddenly she stopped before her mother; there was a steely glitter in her almond eyes, and she almost hissed,

"You wish me to marry this man, mamma?"

Mrs. Tremaine was surprised at her daughter's manner, but seeing that she expected an answer to her interrogative assertion, said:

"Yes, certainly; I should be glad to see you marry him."

"Well, then, I will do it, as I have never before done anything to please you, or any one else but myself." And she laughed an uncanny, mocking laugh.

The usually musical voice sounded harsh and discordant as she continued, "I will tell you frankly, that when I came I had no such intention; I thought only to make him my victim, his passion the amusement of an hour, and then to let him go; maimed and bleeding it is true, but not beyond the healer's art."

At this, a cold smile for an instant wreathed her

lips, and with growing anger and deeper emphasis she added:

- "But now that he has dared to scorn and insult me by feigning an admiration that he did not feel, I swear that he shall yet feel for me all that he feigned, and more."
  - "Why do you talk so, child? You must be mad."
- "Oh, no! I am not mad; but when I think of the puny-faced girl that this man loves, and the false and mocking incense that he offered me, it almost makes me so."

She really believed that Harold St. George loved Clare Vivien, and that night when all his soul seemed in his eyes, was only playing a part, in pure derision of her hitherto unquestioned charms. It was not alone her outraged pride that had provoked her to such wrath, her vanity was also piqued and deeply wounded. In all her past, when she had tried to please and conquer, no man had resisted; and for the strength that dared defy her, she hated Harold St. George, and woe betide him, if that strength came only from a child's dark eyes.

Maud Tremaine was not usually demonstrative or impulsive, and she had been moved by passion to say more than she intended; but she proved her returning wisdom, by throwing herself upon her mother's bosom and sobbing violently; thus winning that mother's sympathy and pardon for her unwomanly thoughts and words. When Mrs. Vivien left her, it was with the feeling that an insult had in truth been offered to her darling, and her own disappointment in the failure of her well laid scheme, added rancor

to the bitterness with which she thought of Mr. St. George.

As for him he was feeling desolate and miserable. When he reached home after his unsuccessful audience with Mrs. Vivien, he shut himself up in his own room, out of sight and sound, even of his little Réné.

"It will break Clare's heart," he thought. "I cannot bear to tell her. She feels so intensely, whatever she feels at all. My poor darling, if she was only my own child, how happy I could make her."

So deeply he pitied her, that the incongruity of his thought did not occur to him. He thought of her home, in which, beside her father's love, there was so little felt for her; and a great yearning came into his heart, to lift her far out of her ungenial surroundings. But there was no feasible way of doing this, and he dreaded to see her, knowing well that her mother would leave to him the unpleasant task of communicating his failure.

He knew, or thought it probable, that he would meet her, as well as Miss Tremaine, on the next evening, as at that time a large portion of the people of the town and country around were expected to be the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Trafton, who were decidedly the most influential people in the neighborhood, ranking next in wealth to Mr. St. George, and certainly far outstripping him in those hospitalities, for which his house had once been famous.

Judge Trafton was a lawyer, who had filled several public offices with credit to himself, and was then and had been for some years, judge of the district. His wife was an amiable and cultivated

woman, and his son and two daughters quite as agreeable and accomplished.

The entertainment to be given was in honor of Miss Agnes, the younger daughters' eighteenth birthday; and having been only six months from school, she was also to make her début.

They had been both polite and cordial to Mr. St. George since his return, and beside entertaining a real regard for them, he felt that etiquette would demand his attendance.

But he could not help shrinking from the necessity, which he felt assured would bring him once more into Maud Tremaine's too dangerous presence.

"I am weak, no doubt," he thought, "but am I not stronger, knowing my weakness so well? A woman's face once drove me mad, and this one is fair as mortal face can be; yet—, I do not trust her; why then need I fear?"

Ah; false security! that had deluded many other men, and led them straight to Maud Tremaine's feet.

### CHAPTER VII.

### SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER.

"If to her share some female errors fall,

Look on her face, and you'll forget them all."

—Pope.

THE evening of the party found Clare still anxiously "waiting for the verdict." She knew that Mr. St. George had seen her mother, but she did not know that, to succeed, he could not have chosen a more luckless time, nor she a more luckless advocate; for it had served to strengthen Mrs. Vivien's conviction of his growing regard for Clare, which only added intensity to her resolve. As her mother said nothing to her of the interview, she did not like to question her; and she feared the worst, from Mr. St. George staying away.

She cared very little for the entertainment to which she was going, and with a bare exception (the hope of seeing Mr. St. George) expected a miserable evening, so little was her mind, in its unrest, attuned to pleasure's notes.

Dictated by her own good taste, her dress was simple and suited to her years. It was an embroidered muslin, and the waist, which was high at the neck, and the sleeves that reached to the elbow, were of the softest puffings, embroidery and lace, and although quite thin, the arm that was half revealed was as perfect as if carved from marble.

Bunches of scarlet verbenas were fastened at her throat, on her sleeves, and wherever the overdress required looping. In her short, dark hair she twisted a spray of the flowers, and stood a moment more before her mirror, taking in the tout ensemble. The dress was becoming and in exquisite taste, from the crown of her classic head, to the soles of her daintily booted feet, and although she had never looked better in her life, she was not satisfied.

"He is such a worshiper of beauty, that he will never love me," she thought, and shook her head with a rueful sigh.

At that moment Margaret Hardy came in to see her favorite, arrayed for her first party. As she approached the young girl, she lifted her hands with delighted admiration, and said:

"Bless my life, but you do look pretty; take my word, you will charm somebody's heart away from them to-night."

"Ah, my good Margaret, if I could find others as partial as you are, then I might," Clare said, softly, laying one fair arm around the faithful woman's neck. Tears dimmed her young eyes. Of their source, Margaret was ignorant; and, in truth, she was herself but little wiser. She only knew that she had not, and could not escape from the cloud which had enveloped her for days.

Margaret assisted her in putting on her wraps, wished her a happy evening, and said "Good night." As she passed from the room, Clare called to her:

"You should go and see my sister, she will be worth looking at."

"No doubt," Margaret said, with a grunt of dissatisfaction. She did not like Miss Tremaine, having seen much and heard more of her wonderful career. Like most women who knew that young lady too well, she thought there was something uncanny about her beauty, a power that lured men to their ruin, even against their wills.

Oh, senseless superstition! Maud Tremaine's arts were only those of a mortal woman—beautiful, strong-willed, unscrupulous—mercilessly bent on her own aims and pleasures, and in her onward and desolating career, careless and heedless of the heartwrecks and ruined lives she left behind her.

When Margaret entered her room, for a moment she stood in mute amazement. She had always thought Miss Tremaine beautiful; but to-night she was more than beautiful—she was dazzling.

Her mother was putting the last touches to her superb toilet. The dress was one of Worth's most exquisite combinations, of palest blue silk, satin, and some diaphanous material of silver and blue. Her white arms and shoulders gleamed like polished marble; at each delicate ear blazed a splendid diamond; a necklace of the same rare jewels encircled her white throat, and a spray of them glittered and flashed amid her blonde tresses. These gems were a gift from her aunt, while abroad, and were perfectly adapted to her wondrous and striking costume.

Mrs. Vivien looked at her with fond and wondering pride, and turning to Margaret, asked what she thought of her.

"Miss Maud is handsomer to-night than I have

ever seen her, and I could say no more than that, I am sure," Margaret answered.

As she turned to leave the room, the mother thought of the young daughter, who, unaided and alone, had arrayed herself for that first entrance into society, which, to most young girls, is a charmed event, and she asked:

- "Have you seen Clare, Margaret?"
- " Yes."
- "How is she looking?"
- "And haven't you seen her?" the woman asked, with such astonishment, that Mrs. Vivien flushed at the implied neglect, and said apologetically:
- "She is young yet, not out, you know, and it makes very little difference about her toilet, so that it is neat."

Without a word, Margaret left the room, feeling more indignant with her mistress, than she had in all the ten years she had been in her service.

Mrs. Vivien looked handsome and stately, in black velvet and the pearls, which were her husband's bridal gift. It had been years since she had worn them last, and he looked pleased and gratified to see them, when she entered the sitting-room with her daughter. Both he and Clare had been waiting for them, and outside the gate Joseph Hardy and the old-fashioned family carriage were waiting also.

They had only two miles to drive, and it was not long before they made their appearance in Judge Trafton's already well-filled parlors. After the usual ceremony of introduction had been gone through with, they naturally separated, the young

ladies led away by escorts, and the father and mother, taking their position among the older guests.

Miss Tremaine flashed upon the company, a brilliant apparition from some fairer world. All eyes were turned upon her, and as she stood leaning upon Mr. Dartmoth's arm, superb in her matchless beauty, she was the center of an admiring throng, who pressed eagerly forward, for an introduction, or an engagement to dance. This incense was the food she lived on, but now it was unsavory; for among the throng who gathered near her, one face was missing. She knew that Mr. St. George was in the room, for she had seen him; at first standing apart from the throng, and later saw him approach Clare who was with young Mr. Trafton, bend over her and talk for some minutes, and if Mr. Dartmoth who looked such admiration into the lovely smiling face, could have seen beneath that angel guise, the evil writhing heart, he would have turned from her with shuddering disgust. But alas! the mask was far too beautiful not to be impenetrable, and perhaps he would have been able to forgive some imperfections in her nature, since she had none in either face or form.

She saw that Percy Dartmoth was handsome and distinguished looking, and she had heard, that he was the betrothed lover of Judge Trafton's older daughter. These were sufficient reasons for her to attempt his conquest.

"For the other I will bide my time," she thought. After her first waltz with Mr. Dartmoth, she had

little time for thought, for she was always in the gayest whirl of the dancers or in the midst of an enraptured group.

Mr. St. George saw her enter the room, and his heart thrilled with delight in her beauty; but also with the same vague unrest, he had felt from the first, in her presence. He looked long and earnestly, then his gaze wandered to her young sister, and rested there contentedly. He did not wait long before going to her.

"You are looking lovely to-night Clare, some fairy godmother must have found you," he said in a low voice, and was amply repaid for the well merited compliment, by a pleased happy glance from the soul-full eyes.

He stood chatting pleasantly for some moments, with her and Mr. Trafton, then went over to Miss Agnes Trafton, to whom he was engaged for the next square dance, which was to be the Lancers; in the interval they watched the waltzers go whirling past them.

"Have you observed Miss Tremaine to-night, Mr. St. George?" Miss Agnes asked. Seeing that he hesitated, she added, "I suppose of course you know her."

"Oh, yes! I know Miss Tremaine, and saw her enter the room this evening."

"Have you ever seen any one of womankind more radiantly beautiful than she is to-night?" the young girl asked with enthusiasm.

"Aye, she is beautiful as a dream," he murmured

almost under his breath, as Maud Tremaine's white arms and splendid jewels flashed near and past him.

After this, seeming irresistibly impelled to it, he watched her almost unceasingly, until he commenced dancing himself. Like one in a dream, he answered his bright young partner at random; and was glad when the dance was over, that, free from all restraint, he might take himself once more in hand. He left the crowded room and went out into the night, and when he returned, the music of the waltz for which he was engaged to Clare, had commenced. He found her, and they were soon floating off to the music of one of Strauss' delightful waltzes. They danced well together and he enjoyed it so thoroughly, that for a time Maud Tremaine's haunting beauty was forgotten; and Clare was so happy that she wondered at her mood of an hour ago. When the waltz was over, she said in a slightly anxious tone.

"You have not told me my mother's answer."

"If you will come over to-morrow at ten, I will give you the entire interview," he said, in a flurried way; and added, after a moment, "I would go to Claremont, but if I did, would probably have no opportunity of seeing you alone."

"I will be there at ten," she answered, as a gentleman came up to claim her for the next set.

Mr. St. George wandered across the room to where Glen Trafton stood talking to Mrs. Wetherill, a near neighbor of the Traftons. They were discussing the beauty of the evening, and as he

approached them, the lady asked him if he had never met Miss Tremaine.

"Yes, once, in her own home," he answered, quietly.

"I have not seen you with her this evening, Mr. St. George. Have you, then, no eye for beauty?" she asked, quizzically.

For all answer he smiled grimly, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps Mr. St. George is like myself," Glen Trafton said, "and thinks it safer to view this brilliant meteor from a distance. But, all jesting aside, while I know that she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, she does not attract me; and I would not give one pure soft glance from Clare's dark eyes, for all this syren's subtle witcheries."

As he spoke, his eyes rested tenderly on the young bright face, whose owner's name he had just mentioned so reverently.

Harold St. George noted the words and the tone, and, with a slight aching at his heart, thought, "And so my little Clare has a lover thus early." He was not much pleased either with Mr. Trafton's frankly expressed opinion of Clare's sister. "What does this young bigot know of her," he thought, "that he can look down from such superior heights?"

"Your intended brother-in-law seems all devotion to Miss Tremaine," Mrs. Wetherill said, addressing Glen Trafton.

"Yes, Percy seems to have lost his head," the

gentleman answered dryly, and crossed the room to where Clare was standing. Soon after they saw him dancing with her.

Mr. St. George then paid his respects to Mr. and Mrs. Vivien. He found him cordial as usual, but she was icily distant. He talked constrainedly for a few moments, and not comprehending the lady's manner, left them, to once more join Clare, and soon Mrs. Vivien saw them waltzing past her. But it was not long before Mr. St. George brought Clare to them, and bowed himself away.

"I suppose you are happy to-night, Clare," Mrs. Vivien said, with coldest indignation in her voice, "since you have succeeded in prejudicing Mr. St. George so much against your sister, that he has not paid her the common civility of speaking to her."

The merciless rebuke was to Clare so unexpected, that for a time she did not comprehend it; but as the words gathered force and meaning, her face crimsoned from outraged feeling, and her voice sounded haughty as her mother's, as she replied:

"You surely do not mean what you have said. The thought is unworthy of my mother. Since my sister came, her name has passed neither my lips nor his, and he certainly did not seem prejudiced the first evening they met."

Mr. Vivien being engaged in conversation with a gentleman sitting near, had heard none of this, and when he turned once more to his wife and daughter, it was to see the latter moving off with Mr. Trafton.

The first opportunity Clare had of speaking to

Mr. St. George, she asked him why he had not spoken to her sister during the evening.

"Miss Tremaine is the center of such a brilliant galaxy of admirers that she could scarcely miss my poor efforts to please," he answered, with a shadowy smile.

- "Yet it has been noted and wondered at."
- "Do you wish me to speak to her, little one?" he asked, looking gravely into the innocent eyes.
- "I would be glad if you would do so," she answered, simply.
- "Then to please you, Clare, remember that, and at your bidding, I will go to her."

And without another word he left her, mystified and wondering, and walking straight to Miss Tremaine, bowed and asked the pleasure of a waltz.

"You come late, Mr. St. George; I fear my card is full," the lady answered, coldly, glancing down at the card as she spoke.

"Is there no name of any one there from whom I might beg a single waltz; they having been already honored."

She shook her head, laughing softly and ironically.

"Surely you are not engaged for after supper, too," he asked so eagerly that she thought again, "What manner of man can he be, to linger away from me through more than half the evening, with such apparent indifference, and when he does come, sue for a single waltz, as if his very life depended upon the obtaining."

At her heart, she felt such hot wrath against him

that she could have almost annihilated him with a glance. But it was not her policy to be even rude, and she smiled serenely into his face and answered:

"Yes, for after supper too, I fear your case is hopeless; unless this gentleman," turning to Mr. Dartmoth, —"will relinquish to you one of his 'valses."

"Surely you cannot refuse me, Dartmoth," Mr. St. George said pleadingly.

"If it is Miss Tremaine's wish, I will yield my claim to you," that gentleman answered stiffly.

A few more words of idle pleasantry and they separated until after supper, when Mr. St. George claimed his waltz. Slowly at first they glided away to the music's softly voluptuous measures; then swifter whirled with the whirling throng, and all this time Harold St. George was looking down at that upturned, maddening face; into the darkening violet eyes, and at the dewy freshness of that perfect mouth. He knew that his old madness was once more stealing over him; Maud Tremaine felt his arms tighten convulsively around her, and she smiled languidly and bewitchingly into the passion blazing eyes. Round and round they went in that wild whirl, until at last her head almost dropped upon his shoulder. "You are weary," he said softly, "we will stop."

They waltzed through an open door into a little morning room which was unoccupied.

Still holding her in that fierce clasp, he looked down at her, with passionate longing; and fonder

and warmer grew his hold; nearer and nearer his face bent down to hers, until she felt his hot breath on her brow; then with a groan, slowly as if palsied, his arms fell from her, and she stood alone; while he sank nerveless on a divan near, and hid his face in his hands.

- "Strange, incomprehensible man," Miss Tremaine said at last, in a low voice; then more haughtily she asked:
- "Have you meant to mock and insult me? do you act a part, or what do you mean?"
- "I meant no harm to you, believe me, but much to myself I fear," he answered in a sad, constrained voice.

Rising and holding out his hand to her, he said frankly, and in a more natural tone:

"If I have offended you, pardon me, Miss Tremaine, for in truth I meant no offense."

Looking into his eyes, she read such noble sincerity, that she did not hesitate to take his hand and say, as sweetly as none but Maud Tremaine could:

"From whatever motive you have acted Mr. St. George, believing you to be sincere in what you say, I forgive both the motive and the action." And with a last bewildering glance, she vanished through the open door.

He felt enraged with himself, and ashamed to have been outdone in generosity by a woman.

Like one stunned he sat for full five minutes, enduring an agony of self-reproach; then desperately, and almost aloud, he said:

"I cannot trust her, strive as I may; oh, my

God! why hast thou ever made anything so beautiful for man's undoing."

He lingered only until he had regained composure, then sought his host and hostess, said good night, and quietly left the house; when mirth and revelry seemed highest.

Maud Tremaine saw him go, and felt a thrill of triumph, as she thought:

"He may resist me for a time, but he will be mine at last."

Clare missed him from the room, and soon grew weary of both mirth and music; and when her father proposed going home, assented so eagerly that he asked if she had not enjoyed the evening.

"Oh, yes," she answered, "but I am fatigued, and think it best to go."

All the way home, and even in her dreams, the wonder haunted her, why Harold St. George had not said good night.

# CHAPTER VIII.

#### CHRISTMAS PRESENTS.

"What was love then? Not calm, not secure, scarcely kind!
But in one all intensest emotions combined:
Life and death: pain and rapture: the infinite sense
Of something immortal, unknown and immense?"

-Owen Meredith.

CHRISTMAS morning Clare jumped out of bed and going to the window, found that it was snowing slightly; but she had no thought of letting that prevent her from keeping her engagement; and when she went down to breakfast, was ready with the exception of her wraps, for her walk to Olney Heights.

Miss Tremaine did not make her appearance, and when Clare told her father and mother of her invitation to spend the day with Réné, and her desire to accept it, she was spared all unpleasant commenting.

Mrs. Vivien thought it would be useless to deprive her of this pleasure, as she would be so soon removed from all possible danger. Christmas was no more than any other day at Claremont, there being no small children, and no mythical visits from Santa Claus.

When Clare reached Olney Heights she found the family, servants included, gathered around a huge Christmas tree, then in a blaze of glory, with its dazzling lights, brilliant hued balls, nick-nacks and toys. There, too, stood the traditional St. Nicholas, with his pack on his back, and his venerable beard, fur hat and robes dotted over with snow and ashes, as if fresh from his descent through the chimney.

At Clare's entrance he began unloading; on the tree he hung bon-bons, all kinds of fire crackers and numerous toys; then handed to each one some kind of present.

Clare had wondered at Mr. St. George's absence, but soon recognized him through his disguise, and when Réné, in the midst of her excitement, missed her father, and called loudly for him to come and see what Santa had brought, she could not repress a smile.

Santa Claus's huge pack was empty at last; and bowing, he put his finger to one side of his nose, gave a long, low whistle, and was gone, before any one had time to think; almost as if he had vanished into the air.

It seemed scarcely a moment to Clare, when looking up from the unopened package in her hand, she saw that the servants had gone, and Réné was exhibiting to her father one of her presents, a gold necklace and medallion.

He walked over to her and asked why she had not looked at her present. Then took the package from her hand, opened it and displayed a handsome Russian leather case, which he handed to her. On opening it she was amazed to see an exquisitely fashioned necklace and locket; the latter with her monogram formed of large and small diamonds on

one side, and the carved monogram on the other. "It has evidently been made to order," she thought, and looking up ruefully, asked:

- "Why have you given me anything so handsome as this? My own poor gifts seem like nothing to me now."
- "Nonsense," he answered; "I should have been glad if I could have thought of anything that would have pleased you better."
- "That would have been impossible," she replied, then stepping outside into the hall, she called to him, and asked if he would not assist her in with her packages.
  - "Annetta brought them over for me," she said.
- "I saw Annetta's and Celestine's presents; they are very proud of them, and I am sure that whoever these are intended for, will be equally so," he said, quizzically, and commenced opening the packages. He displayed first a small easy chair, the upholstering exquisitely embroidered, a tiny pin-cushion and mats, and a complete outfit of worsted crochet, for Réné's large doll. All these were for the child, and in her delight she kissed Clare again and again.

He then unwrapped a handsomely upholstered foot-rest, and a pair of slippers with his monogram on them; looking very much as if they had been made over his own last, which with Annetta's assistance they really had been.

He looked at them a moment in pleased surprise and admiration. Whatever had been his expectations, she saw that they were more than realized; and this was soothing balm to the wounds of an overwrought and somewhat morbid depreciation of her efforts.

Turning to her at last, he said, gravely, "You say that by comparison, your presents seem naught; while mine did not cost me an hour of trouble, and yours bear evidence of days and weeks of labor. Truly there is no comparison, and mine is so far on the losing side that to bring it up to anything like par value, I will show you what the locket contains; and I hope it is not vanity in me to think that it will enhance the value of your present." So saying he opened the locket and revealed on one side a truly splendid picture of himself, and one of Réné on the other.

Clare gave a bound of delight. "Oh, Mr. St. George," she said, "you could not have given me anything that I would have prized so much;" and she looked down at the faces tenderly. Her sweet mouth trembled, and tears of rapture dimmed the dark, lustrous eyes.

Mr. St. George, who was watching her, thought, "She is very fond of us, the dear, sweet girl," and for the first time that morning the thought came to him with keenest pain, of what he must tell her.

He went up to her then, and closed the locket in her hand. "You can look at that when you cannot look at me," he said with a smile; and taking them from her, he clasped the necklace around her neck, saying as he did so, "Thus I fasten my chains upon you, little one, may they be always 'rosy fetters." Then bending down, he kissed gently the low, broad brow. Unheeding the blush which followed his caress, and thinking only to put off the evil moment,

when she would ask him for her mother's answer, he walked to the piano, opened it, and proposed that they should have some music.

Réné had gone to Celestine with her presents, and Clare thought, "what a fitting time for him to tell me what he has promised." But she did not care to show her impatience, and little as she felt inclined for music, her heart being burdened with anxious doubt, obedient to his wish she went to the piano at once, and played the accompaniment, and sang with him song after song.

At last, feeling that she could bear the suspense no longer, with the desperate resolve to know the worst, she turned to him and asked the question he had dreaded so long.

"Come with me, dear," he said, and taking her by the hand he led her to a sofa and sat down by her.

Her heart sank, for she knew intuitively, that it was the tenderness of pity that was so manifest in him.

Like one in a dream, she heard him go over all the details of his conversation with her mother. Very gently he told her the unwelcome news, and taking her little cold hands in his, looked down at the stormy young face, and read such passionate anguish as filled his own heart with unutterable pain.

She neither spoke nor moved, but still looked into his eyes with that awful despairing gaze. It was more than he could bear, and putting his arms around her, he drew her gently to him.

"Child, child, why do you suffer so?" he asked. She did not answer him, and feeling all the pity

for her sorrow that he could have felt had she been his own child, more tenderly than he had spoken yet, he said:

"Clare, little one, will you not speak to me? Tell me, my darling, why does this thing grieve you so much?"

There was a moment's silence before she answered him.

"Because I would rather die than leave you," she said at last.

There was such thrilling intensity in the voice, that he looked at her at once, and was startled by what he saw. The young face was ablaze with emotions, that lifted her far from her childhood, and in the dark eyes glowed such passionate love, as he had been blind not to see. But it was only a moment he saw, for freeing herself quickly from his clasp, she stood erect, leaving him bewildered and in doubt as to what he had seen.

"She is so young, so very young, may it not have been the hallucination of my own brain," he thought.

But, truth or vision, he knew that while life lingered, the memory of that look would never pass from his mind.

Clare had walked to the window, and was looking out sadly at the new-fallen snow, that robed the earth with its mantle of white.

"I shall have the pleasure of taking you home in my new cutter," Mr. St. George said, approaching her, and before she had time to reply, the lunchbell rang and Réné came bounding into the room, as merry as a kitten, making her feel more deeply by the contrast her own wretched mood; and she resolved, if possible, to throw it off. She was not herself aware of how much she had revealed to Mr. St. George in her anguish; but notwithstanding that, could not help feeling a little nervous and shy, and this, added to the natural sadness from her great disappointment, made her anything but companionable.

He was so perfectly frank and unrestrained in his manner, so kind and thoughtful for her comfort, and talked so brightly of the letters he would write, and those he would expect from her, when she was away, that she soon regained a part of her usual cheerfulness; and when she sat fur-robed in the handsome sleigh, behind two spirited horses, the bells jingling merrily, Réné clapping her little hands with delight, and Mr. St. George smiling at her, and saying bright, witty things; in the comfort and delight of the moment, she forgot all her troubles, and laughed out as joyously as Réné herself.

Having accomplished this, Mr. St. George felt quite satisfied with himself. They took a long ride, and when they reached Claremont, it was so late that he declined to go in, but told Clare that he would be over after dinner, and, if agreeable, take all of them a moonlight sleigh ride.

It was still snowing, but she found a path made to the house, and reached it without difficulty; then turning to them, waved a farewell.

In the evening, true to his word, Mr. St. George

went over in his sleigh and took the whole family out.

Miss Tremaine occupied the front seat by his side, and was unusually quiet, seeing no doubt, that he was so much engaged with his horses, that all the battery of her chaims would not impress him. Beside, she knew that there came a time to all, when silence was desired, and this time judged her companion well, and fitted her mood to his. By doing so, her silence was more charming than would have been the wittiest bon-mots of the wisest woman.

Without being a genius of any kind, and, in fact, incapable of large intellectual growth, she yet had that intuitive knowledge of mankind, which served her purpose better. With subtle and witching power searching men's hearts, and sounding and measuring their foibles and weaknesses. With their strength she had naught to do, and cared but little for it, believing that with charms like hers to aid her oily tongue, it could avail them little.

It is small wonder, that she already knew the weakness that had darkened so many hours for the man sitting beside her, and without seeing or having faith in the true nobleness, and capacity to resist and overcome, which, like a vein of rich ore, underlaid whatever was gross or unworthy in his nature, she resolved to make that weakness her stepping-stone to fortune and to vengeance. For although she smiled sweetly into his eyes, she had neither forgotten nor forgiven.

The night was so beautiful and the horses in such perfect training, that it would have been impossible not to enjoy the ride; and when Mr. St. George landed his friends at home, they overwhelmed him with thanks for the pleasure he had given them.

Driving home his thoughts were once more busy with Maud Tremaine. "Can it be that I do her injustice when I shrink from her? Do I fear her only because she was so beautiful? She cannot help my madness, even though she inspires it. To night she seemed a fair, sweet woman, no lurking devil of coquetry in her eyes—; I will wait and watch her from a distance, for I dare not come too near——'

From the proud beauty, his thoughts wandered to the innocent girl, into whose fond, young heart, for one brief moment he had looked. "Could I have dreamed," he thought, "but even if it be true, she is so young——she will forget—; and I, alas! am so unworthy of her."

### CHAPTER IX.

#### A LONG FAREWELL.

And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day,
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away."
—Longfellow.

ROM Christmas eve to New Year's morn, had been a gala week to the people of Olney and the country around it. All day long and far into the night, the music of the merry jingling sleigh bells could be heard; and at different houses, each evening they would congregate and with flying feet chase busy care into the "wee sma" hours. Once they met at Claremont, and once at Olney Heights; and both Harold St. George and Mr. Vivien proved hosts to the manor born. Clare had seen Mr. St. George every day, but never alone. Pleasure's giddy whirl had left her so little time for thought, that in those last days, to him she seemed, once more, a gay and charming child. Listening to her ringing laugh, and watching the merry abandon with which she entered each new sport, it was not strange that he should think. "Being a child her trouble rests but lightly with her, and on the wings of time, must soon be borne away."

True to his promise to himself, he watched also, that dangerously charming woman, before whose

shrine, half the men of the town and county, were prostrating themselves; few, having little more than the hope of a smile, yet lingering still in her train.

But maddest of all her worshipers seemed Percy Dartmoth. Unmindful of the sad-eyed woman, who was his promised wife, forgetful of all former vows, or if remembering false to them; enraptured, he hung on every word that fell from the siren's lips, and seemed to live truly, only in her presence. And she, at first from pure coquetry and the vain glory of tormenting another woman, gave him her sweetest smiles, and most alluring glances. When he had bolder grown, with inborn tact, she led him still; but held him ever at that charmed distance, where hoping much, he yet had much to fear.

Mr. St. George had been looking on, not wholly undisturbed, but saved from a possible danger, by what seemed to him, the most merciless coquetry; and while he had no great pity for Percy Dartmoth, could not find it in his heart, to censure his reckless daring, as all the rest of the small world of Olney did.

"That radiant face, which should have been bestowed to bless, might win from their allegiance, men better far than either Percy Dartmoth or myself," he thought, and therefore would not judge him.

This bright New Year's day, they kept open house at Claremont. In the dining-room a table was laden with delicacies, and in the parlor, the ladies were ready for their expected friends. Clare

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seemed to have taken up life's burdens once more, and with a dreary look in her eyes, sat drumming idly upon the piano. Maud Tremaine was eagerly defending herself to her mother, who had been reproving her, for her flirtation with Mr. Dartmoth, when Mr. St. George who was their first guest, was announced. He came in cheerily, shook hands with all, and was soon engaged in animated conversation.

Clare had not moved from her seat, when she heard him say, that a few hours before coming over, he had received a letter from an old friend and client in San Francisco which would necessitate his once more leaving home, to be gone several months. She was then, all attention, and before she was conscious herself of what she was doing, was at his side, plying him with questions as to when he would go and why.

- "I will go in a few days," he answered, smiling at her eager interest, "and my reason for going is, that my friend is in delicate health, and has on hand a complicated law-suit in which he has much at stake. Having been his lawyer before leaving California, I am familiar with the intricacy of his business, and of this suit, that has been long pending; and entertaining for him the sincerest friendship, at his earnest request I give him my personal advice and assistance; I regard it my duty as well as a pleasure to do so."
  - "And Réné, what will you do with her?"
- "I shall take her and Celestine with me," he answered gravely, "and Olney Heights will be as it was six months ago, with scarce a footprint left, to

mark, that its master has been there." Then musingly he added, "I never thought to leave her shades again, but now it is best perhaps." And looking a little wearily at the enchanting woman, who was then greeting other guests who had arrived, it came to him like an inspiration, that it was the workings of Providence in his behalf, to remove him from perils, he might be powerless to resist.

As for Miss Tremaine, she had not been unobservant of his silent scrutiny during the past week, and had been well satisfied to wait; believing that her spell was working surely and resistlessly. This sudden announcement, which threatened the destruction of all her hopes, had for a moment stunned her; but she was soon herself again, and not even a quiver of the trained eyelids betrayed her agitation. She smiled as sweetly and serenely, as if no tumult of rage was in her heart.

Clare had already drained to the dregs, the bitter cup of separation, and his going could not make her more unhappy than she was already. In fact, she was quite human enough, since she could not have him, to feel a selfish gratification in the thought, that Olney would not have him either.

Mr. St. George was talking to her father, and for the moment she sat quietly thinking.

"You are looking distrait, this morning, Clare, what is the trouble?" Glen Trafton asked, approaching her smilingly.

"I leave home and all my friends, to-morrow, Mr. Trafton; but I was not aware that I was wearing my heart upon my sleeve."

"Why don't you finish, Clare, and say, 'for daws to peck at?'" he asked, laughingly.

"But jesting aside, is this really your last day at

home?"

"For the present yes," she answered.

"Believe me I shall miss you very much," he said, looking tenderly into the dark uplifted eyes.

She knew that this candid young man never said anything he did not mean, and felt grateful to him for his appreciation. In fact, her liking for him had grown with her growth, having known him from childhood; but as a possible lover, he had never presented himself to her mind.

He was perfectly aware, that she did not dream of the passion he concealed, beneath an outward calm, but felt that in years she was still a child; and that it would be a crime against youth and nature, to disturb her maiden innocence. Alas! he little dreamed, that already a "thief in the night," had stolen the jewel, for which he watched and waited. He did not leave her any more during his call, and when he said good-by, she saw the usually firm lips tremble, and felt her hand clasped convulsively in his. She wondered a little, but soon, even the memory of his unusual emotion, passed from her mind.

When Mr. St. George took leave of Clare, he told her that he would be over in the afternoon to take her home with him; as he wished her to say good-by to Réné, who was a little ailing and not able to be out. "Beside this," he added, "I wish you to spend your last afternoon at Olney Heights."

Of course she did not refuse, and in the afternoon as if with one accord, both of them buried all thoughts of to-morrow, and entered into Réné's sports with their old time gayety and abandon.

That evening when they reached Claremont, before helping her from the sleigh, he laid his hand

on hers, and said very tenderly,

"Clare, little one, I shall not see you again for months; but I shall think of you always. I will write to you once a week, and shall require the same of you, dear. Tell me all your thoughts, my child, and while I live you shall never need a friend." Stooping down he kissed her on the pure brow and downcast eyes.

Lower and lower drooped her head, she did not reply, and when he lifted her from the sleigh, almost flew from his arms to the house. He watched her in amazement until she disappeared.

"Poor little Clare, this parting from home and friends is her first heavy cross," he thought, "but time will help her to bear it bravely I am sure. What a wilful charming child she is; how I would like to have her always near me." And he sighed profoundly, as he started homeward through the growing dusk.

Clare did not stop until she reached her own room; once there, she abandoned herself to her grief. Yet she was not without hope, for had he not said, that he would write, and remember her always.

Growing calmer at last, she took out the locket which her dress had concealed; it was still attached

to the necklace, which Mr. St. George had clasped around her neck, and for worlds she would not have unclasped it. Opening the locket she looked at it long, and kissed rapturously the pictured face, which through the coming months of absence must be her friend and comforter.

Clare's parting with her father at the depot, was little less bitter than the one with Mr. St. George the evening before, but she kept up bravely, until the cars were off; when to her mother's disgust, she sobbed uncontrollably. Mrs. Vivien used every available argument with the weeping girl, and finally restored her to a calmness, that did not again forsake her, even when she was left at Madame Campinal's, a stranger among strangers. For she was sustained by the resolve, which had been forming in her heart, to become all that Mr. St. George could wish her to be. To become worthy of him.

Love fired ambition and inspired her dreams; and the memory of every tender word that he had spoken, thrilled her, as when she, blushing, heard them; and it is little wonder, that the hope of his love came to be, the one thing, to her, worth living for.

## CHAPTER X.

#### CONFUSED IDEALS.

"Tel est l'avantage ordinaire
Qu' out sur la beaute les talents:
Ceux-ci plaisent dans tous les tempes;
Celle-la n'a qu' un temps pour plaire."
—Voltaire.

MR. ST. GEORGE was unavoidably detained in California long beyond the time he had expected to remain; and it was eleven months from the day he left Olney Heights when he again reached New York.

He intended his arrival to be a complete surprise to Clare, and in none of his letters had mentioned his expectation. Again and again, he had pictured in fancy her rapturous greeting; and when he learned that she had gone with a school-friend, whose home was in Canada, to pass the holidays with her there, was wholly unprepared for the disappointment; but resolving to make another effort to see her in a few weeks, he left for home. When, ten days later, Clare returned to the city and found his card, her regret was deep and poignant. She wrote him at once a reproachful letter, saying in her usual impetuous fashion, that however little he may have cared, he had robbed her of a great pleasure. This letter both gratified and amused him, and although playfully written, by the amount of interest it evidenced, certainly flattered his self-love, of which he in common with the rest of mankind had a share.

In these months of absence his young correspondent had become very dear to him. With fond interest he had watched the rapid development of her truly brilliant mind; and although a continent had divided them, from her letters he knew her far better, than when he left that parting kiss upon her brow a year before. She seemed a child to him then, and by her undreamed-of capacities alone, had grown to be a woman in his thoughts, capable, he felt, of responding to every intellectual craving of his nature; and high-souled, pure and true, he knew.

Beyond all this, with little vanity, he believed that he could win her for his wife; and the wish to do so had become almost a passion, but not quite. While he knew that to the higher and better part of him she was all that woman could be, in his instinctive worship of physical perfection, he had clothed her in such ideal beauty, that the fear of disenchantment was mingled with his desire to see her. But believing that with her only, of all the women he had ever known, could he find peace and true happiness, he resolved to go to New York, see her, and put his fate in her hands.

When he replied to her letter, which he did at once, he told her of his intended visit; and without saying anything of his hopes or fears, wrote in such a way that she was in a state of ecstacy for days.

Regularly every week letters were exchanged between them. Clare's were often written to both

Réné and Mr. St. George, and the child soon came to look for them eagerly, and began making plans of what they would do when Clare should be once more at home.

Mr. St. George, after making a formal call upon all of his neighbors, with the exception of Mr. Vivien, saw very little of any of them.

He went quite often to Claremont, and Mr. Vivien, in return, passed more time with him than he had ever spent away from his own home. Beside these visits, he was much occupied, on account of his long absence, with the accumulated business of his large estate, having taken the management of it into his own hands.

In this way almost two months passed rapidly away, and it was the middle of March when Glen Trafton, who was paying him a friendly morning visit, asked if Percy Dartmoth was still making a fool of himself over Miss Tremaine.

"I do not know, I am sure. Where is Miss Tremaine?" he asked, flushing slightly in spite of himself.

Mr. Trafton looked at him aghast. "How can you ask, having been a constant visitor at Claremont?"

"Nevertheless, I do in all sincerity, having not the least idea where the young lady is."

"Well, you amaze me! She has been at her step-father's for more than a month, living a very retired life, for her, I believe; but I had no idea that you had not met her, again and again." "It is strange that neither her father nor mother have mentioned to me the fact of her being there."

"Some freak of hers, you may depend," the

young man said, gravely, shaking his head.

"You are prejudiced, Glen. I can see no motive she could have in concealing her presence from me, and I presume it has been an oversight."

"I may be prejudiced," Mr. Trafton answered; but Heaven knows I have good reason for being so, when I see the wreck she has made of a man I once loved as a brother."

"But is the lady altogether in fault?" Mr. St. George asked a little severely.

"Do you believe that he would follow her so madly and persistently if he was utterly without hope? or that any true woman would hold a man to the destruction of both reason and intellect, on an eternal rack of doubt and torture?"

"No, certainly not! but are you quite sure that Miss Tremaine has done this? She may have long since given him an honest, straightforward refusal?"

"I do not believe it, having too much faith in Percy Dartmoth's native good sense, mad as he seems now. But I don't know that he deserves any pity from me. At any rate, in his defense I shall not take issue with you, old friend," Glen Trafton said, smilingly, as he shook Mr. St. George's hand at parting.

Maud Tremaine had really been at Claremont more than four weeks, and the fact not having been mentioned to Mr. St. George, was, as Mr. Trafton suggested, one of her freaks. Having failed with him so ingloriously in her first attempt, she resolved that this new siege should be upon an entirely different basis. Her mother was, of course, her willing and pliant aid; and when Mr. Vivien was instructed not to mention her name, or the fact of her being there, to Mr. St. George, he gave his promise, without the slightest feeling of self-sacrifice on his part, and thinking, too, with a little amusement, that it was barely possible he might not have thought to do so, even if he had not been warned. He was too entirely absorbed in his own pursuits, to ask or even think about why the request was made.

Mr Dartmoth had in truth been a constant visitor since Miss Tremaine's arrival. Sometimes she saw him, but oftener excused herself, and yet he was not deterred from coming just as persistently. Correct as were Mr. Trafton's first remarks of the young lady, in his judgment regarding her treatment of Mr. Dartmoth he was certainly somewhat unjust. For if she had ever felt or shown mercy or pity for any one, it had been Percy Dartmoth. She knew well that he loved her as no man living had ever loved her, and it would be a heart of stone that this truth could not touch. Beside, he was handsome, brilliantly gifted, and in every way capable of winning a woman's first and highest regard, provided always that her heart be disengaged. With Miss Tremaine this organ was but poorly developed; being always of feeble growth, it had been hardened and perverted by her life's exceptional experiences. But if there was in this callous heart one soft or

womanly feeling, it was that which she felt for this man, who had given up to worship of her, all that seemed best and fairest in his life: fame, ambition, woman's love, all lost in this yawning holocaust, and still the sacrifice was incomplete. For her sake he had neglected friends and every duty that had once made him a leader among men, and his name a power for weal or woe in the community in which he lived. Distinguished from early youth for his unusual talents, no young lawyer at the bar, had the promise of a brighter future. Judge Trafton had known him from boyhood, and loved him almost as well as his own son. He had seen the boy's brave father fall mortally wounded in the fiercest of the conflict at Bull Run, and had borne back his dying message to his wife and son. From that time he had felt and manifested a deep interest in young Dartmoth's When, after a few years, the boy was left alone, orphaned indeed, he found both sympathy and affection in Judge Trafton's genial home. growing and mutual attachment between young Dartmoth and his daughter Lilian, the father observed and encouraged, feeling that although the young man had little beside his practice and his talent, these alone were a dower he might well be proud of in a son-in-law.

Mr. Dartmoth's affection for Miss Trafton seemed all that she desired, and he was satisfied, having known no other. A quiet, undemonstrative engagement took place, and they were to have been married in a few months, when he met fate in Maud Tremaine's form, and from the first seemed struck

with blindness and madness. Following her to New York when she returned to her aunt, he remained there for weeks, her devoted cavalier; and when he returned, was so moody, so utterly estranged from all his former ways of life, that one by one his friends deserted him; not, however, without a feeling of pity, believing him to be the victim of a woman's wiles. Through all the long summer, to Newport, Saratoga, or wherever his beautiful love led the way, he would follow-always and ever her most adoring admirer. At last, when in September he once more returned home, as no words had passed between the betrothed pair since his fatal estrangement, with outraged feelings Glen Trafton went to his sister Lilian, and asked her permission to remonstrate with her shameless lover.

"Let him alone, my dear brother," the lady answered, sadly; "it is well for me that it was not too late. As for him I can but pity him, feeling that his punishment will be greater than any we could inflict."

Thus quietly the matter ended, to be no more alluded to by any member of the household, and soon the pale, quiet face of the saddened woman, was their only reminder of what might have been.

When Maud Tremaine came once more into their midst, her arrival had little power to move them from this settled calm; but not so Percy Dartmoth; her coming was unexpected, and he was made happy by the hope, wild as it was, that she had come to be near him. Again and again she had told him that she could never marry him; but instinct

taught him that she cared for him as she did for no one else, and this alone kept hope alive.

Since her arrival he had been a constant visitor at Claremont, and left nothing undone that could add to her pleasure or comfort. He observed that she was changed, a little saddened, or perhaps only more quiet. "But whatever the change, it becomes her well," thought the infatuated lover.

When six weeks had passed and Miss Tremaine had not yet met Mr. St. George, she thought she had played her rôle quite long enough, and resolved to let herself be seen, accidentally, of course; and one bright morning, as it chanced, the very day after Glen Trafton's visit to Mr. St. George, she took a morning walk. Coming at last to an old tree, which grew near the footpath leading from Claremont to Olney Heights, she sat down upon its gnarled roots, and took naturally the most picturesque of attitudes.

When in less than half an hour Mr. St. George came up to her, she looked as fair a picture as ever gladdened the eyes of man. No wonder he stood so reverently before her, looking down at the closed eyelids, and dreamy innocent smile upon the rare red lips. She was so consummate an actress, that for all consciousness of his presence, she might indeed have been sleeping.

"Shall I go and leave her?" he asked himself, even while he knew that some power within was chaining him resistlessly to the spot.

"Miss Tremaine," he said gently, but there was no movement.

"Miss Tremaine," he repeated.

The lovely eyelids trembled, and at last unclosed. Like a startled fawn their owner sat upright, an instant looked, then hid from him her blushing face, with such artless and well feigned confusion, as might well have deceived a wiser man.

"Miss Tremaine have you no welcome for me after these long months of absence?" he asked, holding out his hand.

"Do you really care for my welcome?" she asked, turning to him shyly.

"Why should I not?" he answered, looking so earnestly at her, that her confusion seemed to grow.

"I have always thought that you did not like me, Mr. St. George, and therefore that my welcome would be of little consequence to you," she said in her most musical voice, as she laid her little soft hand in his.

A dark flush rose instantly to his face.

"You are mistaken," he answered huskily, and after a pause asked:

"Is this the reason you have kept me in ignorance of your presence? Only yesterday I learned that you were at Claremont, and was on my way to see you, when lo! a vision stopped me."

Looking at him out of the frankest of eyes, she answered:

"Candidly, it was my reason; I knew from the old time, that your politeness would compel you to call for me, once knowing I was there; and I like you too sincerely well, to enjoy being an added discomfort to you."

For some moments he only looked at her; in fact it was difficult for him to reply, knowing well that his strange conduct had given her just grounds for thinking as she seemed to. Still holding her hand and looking down at her, he said at last.

"Since chance has favored me with this meeting, shall I sit down by you, or will you go with me to Claremont?"

She laughed softly, and answered:

"You may sit down by me if you like."

Moving a little aside, she motioned him to be seated, and having regained her apparently lost composure, they were soon conversing amicably and almost confidentially.

She asked him numerous questions concerning his long absence; evinced deep interest in all he had to say, and replied to him with such quick intelligence and so much candor and simplicity, that he thought, "how I have wronged this woman;" and when at last, in a low, hesitating voice, she said:

"If you do not already dislike me, Mr. St. George, dare I hope to make you my friend? I am in sore need of one, believe me, for no man has ever been that to me;" he was tempted to throw himself at her feet and swear eternal fealty. There was such touching melancholy in her beautiful eyes, and he felt, however much she might have erred, that what she said, was alas! too true; and even though the fault be with herself, in her too fatal beauty, he pitied her none the less, and did not for a moment think, that she in common with all women of her kind, was in-

capable of friendship, and would in truth but lightly prize, its most generous offering at her shrine.

"You do not answer me," she said at last, seeing his moved silence.

"Have I asked too much? It was an impulse bade me speak," she continued; "I have been so wretchedly desperate of late, feeling that the whole world was against me, and wherever I go, the worthless, heartless names of flirt and coquette follow me. Even those who love me, when I can not love them in return, are more cruel than the world that hates me. Oh, I am so weary of it all!"

Clasping her white hands, she looked at him appealingly and asked, "In the wide world is there no friend for me, in whose true and generous heart, I may find justice or mercy?" Tears dimmed the lovely violet eyes, and hung upon the long dark lashes. It was too much for the man who listened with all his soul, to hear with calmness, and moved out of all composure or self-restraint, he answered, in a voice whose agitation was music to his listener's ears.

"What can I say to you? for looking at you now, I can but fear, that it may be impossible to be your friend; and dare I delude you by promises that may prove false, and in the end betray you with a passion which may seem unworthy?"

He was trembling visibly, and his voice sounded even to himself unnatural.

Beneath his burning gaze, her drooping face turned red, then pale, and saying with touching sadness:

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"Alas! it is ever so with me," she buried it in her hands, and wept so bitterly, that consciencestricken and remorseful, he plead to be forgiven.

"If you will trust me, and forgive my treachery if I fail, I will try to be all that you can wish me."

Slowly she uncovered her tear-stained face and looked up into his. In her eyes he saw the confiding look of a child, as she reached forth to him both little hands and said, oh! so sweetly:

"I will trust you, and fear no treachery that I cannot forgive."

Still looking into his eyes, she smiled, a rarely radiant smile; she was so fair and so beguiling, and he was only mortal. Impulses, mad as any he had ever felt, were tearing at his heart; but the memory that she had asked for friendship, and wept at thought of more, restrained him, and he only bowed his head and kissed the hands that lay so unresistingly in his.

"That is the seal of our compact," she said, lightly, withdrawing them from his clasp; and continued in her low sweet voice,

"If you are not weary and can listen to me a little longer, I have something to say to you, my friend."

"Say all that is in your heart," he answered, and be assured I shall not weary of listening."

"In some things my life has been a sad one," she began, "but I will let that pass. From child-hood I have been praised for charms that I have come to loathe; for they have won me only woman's hate, and such love from man as I could not prize.

Year after year with restless longing I have looked in vain, for one firm true friend. I have never loved; no wave of passion has even touched my feet; but when I have been kind and merely smiled on those who seemed my worshipers, I have been branded heartless, false, and utterly unworthy of that fairer destiny that comes to happier women. Even now, in this very place, by people that you know, for the sake of one, who is perhaps worthy of any woman's love (yet has not mine), I am misjudged, condemned, and held in utter horror." She paused an instant, and softly asked,

"Do you know who I mean, my friend?"

Being too candid to deny, he answered simply, "Yes! Mr. Dartmoth I presume."

Bowing affirmatively she said, "Yet Mr. Dartmoth himself would tell you, were you to ask him, that I had not only, again and again, refused to marry him, but had told him quite as often that I never could. He is a generous true-hearted man; I like him, but I cannot love him; and this is my crime."

As she said this, and looked up at him, there was such yearning sadness in her eyes, that he was ready to do battle for her with all the world; and he said, looking down at her, with such infinite tenderness, that even she felt something like a pang of remorse.

"Let the world think and say as it may, remember always, that you have found one heart which will neither doubt nor betray you."

"I will remember," she answered softly, and

once more thrilled him, with that artless confiding look.

"I must go now," she said, rising. "Will you return with me to lunch?"

"No! thank you, but I will go with you to the gate."

When they reached it, he said gravely, "May I come to see you soon, or must I owe that happiness to chance alone?"

"By no means," she answered, smiling brightly. "My friend will be at any and all times welcome."

Thus he left her with the halo of that radiant smile illumining her perfect face; and as he walked away from her, he thought with poignant remorse, that he had little right to censure others, since he had himself so cruelly misjudged her; having steeled his heart against her he now believed, for no other crime than the ideal perfectness he had so long sought vainly. Ay! and no wonder. He sighed profoundly, as he thought of that too bitter past and a face fair as her own. "Yet so utterly different," he said to himself, "for she has a heart to feel and suffer, and if a man could win her love "--; there was such rapture in the thought, he felt a tingling through all his veins; but he remembered that she had asked him for his friendship and no more, and fell at once from hope's Olympean heights.

Alas! for the dark-eyed girl who even then, with fond solicitude, waited and watched for his coming, Thoughts of her that day came only to disturb and torture him.

## CHAPTER XI.

#### FANATICISM.

Its amorous dalliance with my lady's looks,
Back with redoubled ardor were mine eyes
Led unto her: and from her radiant smiles,
When, as I turned me, pleasure so divine
Did lighten on me, that whatever bait
Or art or nature in the human flesh,
Or in its limn'd resemblance can combine
Through greedy eyes to take the soul withal,
Were to her beauty nothing."
—Dante.

FOUR weeks had passed, since that wayside meeting, four letters had gone to Clare Vivien, each with a long apology for not starting, and still farther postponing the time.

Day after day Mr. St. George had been to Claremont, and more and more difficult his rôle had become.

Not so Miss Tremaine, who played her part to such perfection, that even her mother was deceived, and thought:

"What caprice can have come to Maud, that she treats with such indifference, and holds so long at bay, a man, whom she has vowed, shall be her husband?"

Then the disturbing thought came to the ambitious mother, that it might be for Percy Dartmoth's sake, she was letting this golden chance pass from

her; and she watched her wilful child more warily than ever.

Blindfold, Mr. St. George had walked straight into the trap that had been laid for him; daily and hourly his passion had grown, until he was desperate enough to throw off all disguise. Maud Tremaine saw it, and knew that her hour of triumph was at hand.

His frequent visits were already the theme of gossiping tongues, and people looked askant at Percy Dartmoth, and twitted him with his dangerous rival, until, half mad with jealous fear and hope deferred, to his idol first he flew for comfort, and if she failed him, in the maddening wine-cup buried his despair.

Miss Tremaine was too much occupied with her new conquest, to spare very much of her precious time to the old; but she was never anything but kind and gentle to him, and he left her always feeling more bitterness for himself than for her. She knew alas! full well, the love she could trust longest; "one loves me," she thought, "for being as I seem, and the other for being as I am in truth. Let me but throw aside this mask, with which I have charmed him, and Harold St. George will turn from me with loathing; but to Percy Dartmoth, I have been my own true self, and he loves me, faults and all."

But this knowledge in no way changed her fixed resolve, and when Mr. St. George laid name and fortune at her feet, no thought of Percy Dartmoth or his love, prompted her to hesitate. She had reached

the goal for which she started, not without some trouble; but then she thought, the prize worthy the effort.

Triumphantly she announced his proposal to her mother.

"You accepted him of course," the mother said, with eager questioning eyes; for of late she had had little faith that this proposal would ever come, or if it did, be met with any favor.

"I thought that was understood," the young lady answered coldly, as she left her, reassured but wondering. Straight to her own room Maud Tremaine went; walked up to a toilet mirror and for some moments, looked steadily at her own reflection.

"Wretched, smiling mask, what misery and madness you have wrought. Oh! if there be any God for such as I, would he not lead me from this deep darkness?"

The words came slowly, between her clenched teeth; a moment more she looked, then throwing herself across the bed she abandoned herself to her misery. Great tearless sobs shook and tortured her; she felt so impotent to make her fate; so powerful and yet so powerless; but that mood did not last, and an hour after, no one would have dreamed of the passion of horror which had passed over her.

Mr. St. George too went home, not altogether happy, for mingled with the feeling that she was his at last, came ever the unwelcome thought, "Does she love me? she told me that she did, but there is a difference, such a difference in one's ideas of love."

This thought so fraught with doubt and fear,

disturbed him until they met again; when he asked her to go with him to the old tree, which was their first trysting place. He looked down at her very tenderly as he made the request, and for the first time called her Maud. Blushing slightly, she answered:

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"I do wish it, as I too would like to speak to you of my past, and I have the feeling that your heart will comprehend mine better there, than here."

"I will tell her of my past," he thought, "and she will know at once, why the woman I would make my wife, must love me, even as I love."

When they were once more seated under the old tree, from first to last, he told her the sad story with which he had never cared to stain Clare's pure young ears.

Gently as it was possible, he spoke of the erring dead, and laid bare to her his own blighted and lonely heart; its hopes, its aspirations and its cruel disappointments:

She heard him to the end in perfect silence; and even then did not speak, until he said in a tremulous tone:

- "You have heard me, darling, and know now all that my life has been."
  - "Yes," was the low answer.
- "Can you love me as my heart hopes, and demands that you will?" he asked with such eager, fond entreaty, that if ever she had felt pity for him it was then; knowing well that she did not and could never love him; and knowing too, if he did

not, that he was once more the victim of passions which had marred his early life.

"He loves me for my face and form," she thought, "and the heart and mind, that illumines and informs them, are his own ideal creations."

She paused for one moment. "Shall I spare him? poor wretch, he seems to have had misery enough." Thoughts prophetic and tumultuous followed these. "He will find solace in another's arms, and that other will be Clare Vivien," she thought; and her white teeth clenched tightly. Again she thought: "He is rich, he has all that my life is in need of; and why should I care for his happiness, having none of my own?"

The scales were fast turning to the evil side; and now a pale face and dark tender eyes, looms up before her.

"I hate her," she thought, "and I will rivet his chains so tightly, that even if he would, he cannot throw them off."

While these thoughts were passing through her mind, he was holding her hand, and looking fondly, at the downcast face. She lifted it then, bathed in blushes; some soft emotion trembled on her lips, and in her eyes, glowed all the tenderness he sighed for.

"I love you even as you wish," she murmured softly, and arch-traitress though she was, a chill of terror crept through all her veins. In an instant his arms were around her, and he bent down to touch her lips: Quickly she drew herself away, and said almost haughtily, "Not so! Mr. St.

George, to husband alone Maud Tremaine yields her lips."

Then seeing his pained look she added gently,

"Forgive me, but this has been a principle of my life, and if I am not false to it, I love you none the less, believe me."

She was so lovely, and that pleading voice so musically soft, that he was ready to forgive her anything, and stooping low, he kissed her little hands instead; and said very tenderly:

"It is I who should say forgive, and not you, dearest; I will try to transgress no more; but the temptation to do so, is greater than you know."

She smiled archly as she answered:

"You are forgiven, mon cher; in truth against you, I find it difficult to harbor malice."

"May you never have cause, my love. Let us talk now, dear, of that future, that I trust and believe will bring happiness to both of us."

The change from sentiment to practical life, was most agreeable to her, and all of the morning that was left to them, they devoted to discussing its affairs. When he left her they had decided that their marriage should take place in the autumn. At her request he had promised to keep it a secret, until she gave him leave to divulge it.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE BLIGHT UPON LOVE'S OPENING FLOWER.

"And to be wroth with one we love

Doth work like madness in the brain."

—Coleridge.

A LMOST a month passed, and no one but Mr. and Mrs. Vivien knew anything of Miss Tremaine's engagement, although of course surmises were rife, and at last a rumor reached Olney Heights.

Mr. St. George had said nothing to any one there, and had written regularly to Clare and said nothing. He was not satisfied with himself or his letters, feeling that he was not frank; that he was concealing something from her, and by so doing perhaps wronging her. At the first he felt no little disquietude in thinking of Clare and her possible attachment for himself; but he had come to believe, that she was still too much a child when she left, to entertain a very deep regard for any one; and tried to console, and satisfy his conscience, with the reflection, that most probably he would have met with disappointment, had he attempted to inspire her with warmer feelings. He had promised her in one of his letters, that he would go for her in June; at which time she expected to return home, and he meant to keep his word; but he could not help feeling that he would rather she should know the

truth before that time, and determined to ask his betrothed's consent; but he was by no means prepared for the bitterness it evoked. She refused so haughtily and with such evident passion, that he listened in amazed silence.

"What is it to Clare Vivien?" she asked, coldly, and as he did not reply, asked again:

"Do you not know that she hates me?"

"You cannot mean what you are saying, Maud. Clare Vivien never hated living mortal, and most certainly not her sister."

This kindly praise of the absent one, so evidently meant, inflamed her anger more.

"Do I not know full well," she said, with scornful emphasis, "that your first prejudice for me came straight from her?"

"In that, by Heaven, you wrong her," he answered quickly, "for in my presence your name never passed her lips in either praise or blame."

For a moment she was haughtily silent, and he saw that she was but poorly convinced.

"None the less," she said at last, "I know that she does not love me, and will certainly love me no more, from knowing that you love me."

"I do not believe it, for I have every reason to know that she esteems me as a friend; and I believe that the woman I love, even though she were a stranger, will share her friendship with me."

At this Miss Tremaine laughed, a low, unmusical, mocking laugh. She had never before given him such cause for indignation; she was so insolently provocative; for being genuinely angry, for the first

time in his presence, she had almost or quite lost control of herself. She did not love him, but in her heart there was such jealous rage at the absent girl who did, that, sister as she was, feeling neither shame nor pity for her, she coldly asked:

"Would you have me, Mr. St. George, believe you so innocent as not to know that Clare Vivien

loves you, not as a child but as a woman?"

The hot blood rushed to his brow, and hot anger to his heart. She saw that she had gone too far, but what she had said was beyond recall; and while she was conscious of her mistake, she did not dream how great it was, and for her pardon trusted too blindly to charms that for the first time failed her.

"Even if you thought it, how could you bring yourself to say a thing like that of an innocent girl?" he asked, with indignant emphasis.

She answered nothing, but listened with down-cast eyes and crimson face.

"You have pained me more deeply than any words of mine can tell you," he continued, "and I pray you never to repeat by word or action what you have said to-night."

He had thoroughly aroused her to her danger, and she was on her guard at last. Looking up at him with a shy, fond smile, she said:

"Forgive me, dear, but I have been jealous of her always, since I first knew you."

She was so fair, and if she loved him as this jealousy denoted, he could forgive so much. Soon she brought back to his face the old tender smile, and wooed him from his discontent with every art

that she was mistress of. When at last he left her she had little doubt of his entire forgiveness.

True, he had forgiven her; but as he walked home in the starlight, he was conscious of a vague unrest, a shadowy something that was not pain, but rather the protest of an unquiet mind.

"What she said of Clare can not be true," he thought, and then came the memory of one haunting look, which he had never quite forgotten; and his heart was filled with fear for the happiness of one who had been always very dear to him.

"My poor darling," he thought, "I am unworthy of your lightest thought, and you will forget me soon, if you have not done so already."

He did not think this without keen pain, for he had formed no life-plan in which she was not to be his friend. But now all this was changed, and he felt and knew, that if he must see with Maud Tremaine's eyes and feel with her doubting heart, Clare Vivien and he could not spend their lives too wide apart.

He never asked again for permission to write to Clare of their betrothal, feeling a strange dread of doing so, yet all the time hating himself for his deception and concealment, and almost driven wild by her tender, confiding letters.

Slowly his slumbering soul awakened, and while the woman he loved seemed no less fair to him, passion no longer glorified her frailties. He knew that to doubt his happiness was to lose it, and as a drowning man will grasp at straws, hugged his tottering phantom to his breast, in the vain hope of warming it back to life and strength. He was not the blind adoring lover whom Maud Tremaine hoped to find, and she already wearied of the part she played.

"He is too difficult to please; I am tired to death of him," she said frankly to her mother, after a remonstrance from Mr. St. George against her still permitting Percy Dartmoth's devoted attentions.

"If you are tired now, how do you think it will be after marriage, my child?" the mother asked re-

provingly.

- "Once mistress of Olney Heights, it matters little whether I please or not," Miss Tremaine answered coolly. "Tired of him as I am," she continued, "if I could I would shorten the time, between this and our marriage day. But as I can not I intend to pass at least two months of it where I shall not be compelled to look at him."
  - "What do you mean?" Mrs. Vivien asked.
- "I mean that I shall accept my aunt's invitation to accompany her to Washington," and lifting her eyebrows significantly, she continued, "I shall not return until my charming sister does in June. Be assured, mamma, I shall not be forgetful of my interest."
- "You are a willful girl and it is useless to advise you; but I think it will be wisest for you to remain at home."
- "I am sorry, mamma, that you disapprove," the young lady answered airily, "as I have already written to my aunt, saying that she may expect me."

"Have you said anything of this to Mr. St. George?"

"No! certainly not; I shall tell him the day before I leave; that will be time enough."

Seeing her mother's disturbed look, she continued:

"I am quite sure, mamma, that to go away is the very best thing I can do; for I have already lost patience, once or twice when listening to his tiresome lectures; and you have known of old, that my one weakness was an ungovernable temper. I am in no wise changed, and feel that it will be better for both of us, that we part for this brief season."

Mrs. Vivien shook her head uneasily, but said nothing, knowing that it would be of no avail. The next moment Miss Tremaine was called to the parlor to see Mr. Dartmoth, who had come more frequently of late; sometimes meeting Mr. St. George, and when he did, leaving the house with black and scowling looks. Mr. St. George was not any more pleased at meeting him, and growing rebellious at his frequent visits, did not hesitate to express his mind to Miss Tremaine. Only the day before this conversation with her mother he had said to her:

"I do not speak to you in this way, because I am jealous, I believe I am not a man to ever be that; for once knowing that I had a successful rival would be a death-blow to my love. But it is because I regard such trifling, as beneath you, and unworthy of the woman I hope to make my wife. You know how madly in earnest this man is, and yet you let him hope on, in ignorance of the truth."

"Have a care, Harold St. George," she answered in hot disdain, "I have borne enough from you already, this is too much." Then bowing her head in mock humility, she continued, "When Mr. Dartmoth comes again, I will tell him whose chains I wear. He has long known that I will never wear his."

So it ended and if not satisfied, he was at least, ever after silent.

Rumors having reached Annetta, which she could neither affirm nor deny, she went to Mr. St. George and said bluntly, "I have heard, Mr. Harold, that you were to marry soon Mrs. Vivien's daughter, and I came to know if it is true."

The question was abrupt, but the eyes that were looking into his, were so candid and true, that he did not attempt to prevaricate, but answered gravely:

"It is true, Annetta." Then seeing the look of pain and disappointment which swept across her face, he asked kindly:

"What is it, old friend?"

Shaking her head ruefully, she answered:

"Ay! Mr. Harold, I have hoped so much, that it would be the other, my own bonnie lass."

"She is a child, Annetta," he said, his brows knitting gloomily.

"She is not that, but she is over young, no doubt, no doubt—"

She sighed profoundly, and looked up at him so earnestly that he colored beneath her gaze.

"You have the old weakness for a fair face, Mr.

Harold," she said at last! "It has come down to you through generations, from father to son, and none but beautiful women, ever reigned in Olney Heights."

"You know Miss Tremaine, Annetta," he said

eagerly.

"Oh! yes, I have seen her often in the past ten years. She looks like an angel, but I do not love her, as I do my pale, dark-eyed darling."

"But you will learn to love her I am sure, An-

netta."

"I hope so," she answered dryly; and as she turned to go, he asked almost appealingly,

"Have you no word of congratulation for me,

Annetta?"

She smiled up at him grimly and said,

"Time enough yet, Mr. Harold; they would grow cold, before the wedding."

When she left him, he felt very much as if he had been listening to a wayside sermon.

"She is one of the retainers of Olney Heights, that my wife will have to win," he thought, "for evidently she does not love her."

Not long after this he brought Miss Tremaine to the Heights, and Annetta opened for her inspection, the long closed rooms, the once splendid drawingroom, the large state dining-room, and chamber after chamber, all faded and dim with time and seeming ghostly with their memories.

"You would not care to live amid such desolation, would you, Maud?" Mr. St. George asked tenderly. Miss Tremaine shuddered visibly, as she answered:

"Oh! no, I could not bear it; I think I should die of horror in such gloom as this."

He smiled a little sadly, as he said:

"It would not be natural for you to feel as I do, dear, but I love the old house so much, that even its gloom is dear to me. But," he continued, "all this shall be changed. At your bidding, love, my gloomy home shall be transformed into a bower of life and light; for all that your fancy can suggest, or your heart sigh for in a home, I wish you to find in Olney Heights."

She colored at this knightly homage, and repaid him with her sweetest smile.

"He is royal in his love," she thought, even though she did not love him and felt a glow of that triumph which was to come.

All the way home she was unusually charming, and Mr. St. George was more content with himself and his wooing than he had been for many days.

Their engagement soon became a settled matter in the neighborhood, and people no longer discussed it as they do fresh gossip.

At Olney Heights, carpenters, painters and upholsterers, were busily engaged in metamorphosing its old time stately grandeur, into gilded splendor and artistic beauty.

"The temple shall be worthy of its priestess," the master thought, and to this end, spared neither time nor means. In fact since he had found this

occupation, he was happier, and felt less keenly, the aching of his restless heart.

It was the last week in May and the day before her going, when Maud Tremaine told him first of her intended visit.

"Is not your going very sudden?" he asked with surprise, and some little annoyance.

"Yes!" she answered hesitatingly, "but I thought you would not object, as I will be gone only a few weeks."

The lovely eyes were looking so pleadingly into his, that he could say no less than,

"I shall miss you dear, but if the going will give you pleasure, I should be the last to bid you stay."

After this she was so much elated with her anticipated pleasure, that she talked of little else. Strange inconsistency, that with all her strength and tenacity of purpose, she had yet the weakness and fondness of a child, for these small, selfish gratifications.

It had not been a happy visit to Mr. St. George, and when he asked if she and her mother could not return with him to Olney Heights, Miss Tremaine also felt relieved. He wished them to make some suggestion as to changes that were being made. When they entered the house Réné met them with a bright face, saying, as she held it up in her hand:

"See, papa! I have a letter from my old darling, all to myself, and she says that I must answer it with my own little hands."

"Who does she mean?" Miss Tremaine asked a little coldly.

Blushing in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, Mr. St. George replied simply,

"Clare Vivien."

"Ah!" the young lady's lip curled slightly, "that reminds me; I give you now my permission to inform my sister of our engagement; she will hear it from others, and it may possibly be better for her to learn it first from yourself."

He bowed, feeling grateful for the considerate thought, nor little dreamed that this privilege had been granted to him, only, that his hand and no other, should give the fatal stab.

In the evening he made his farewell visit, and found Mr. Dartmoth and several others making theirs also. He had opportunity for very few words, with Miss Tremaine; and left early, feeling dissatisfied with both her and himself; as alas! he had too often done of late.

A day or two passed before he wrote to Clare. When he read the letter over he thought,

"If this were written to one who loved me, it would seem a cruel letter; but then Clare loves me, only as a friend, a brother, and she will rejoice at my happiness. Happiness, oh, my God! am I happy? or am I once more mocking and deluding myself, as I sometimes fear?"

"This is insanity," he said aloud, and folding

the letter, directed it hastily.

He had been so tempted to destroy it that he did not stop now, until it was in the mail.

"If Maud had only never put this cruel thought

in my brain," he thought. "I know it is nonsense, but find it hard to banish."

When he slept it was to dream, not of Maud Tremaine; but of the young dark-eyed sister, whose pure heart she had so ruthlessly unveiled. Sometimes with wildly outstretched arms, she called aloud to him, to save her from engulfing waters; and, again she seemed his guardian angel, protecting him from untold horrors. To awaken from dreams like these, without depression, would have been impossible; and in no enviable frame of mind, Mr. St. George anxiously awaited Clare Vivien's reply to his letter.

# CHAPTER XIII.

### DEATH PASSES NEAR.

"There are loves in man's life for which time can renew All that time may destroy. Lives there are, tho' in love, Which cling to one faith, and die with it; nor move, Tho' earthquakes may shatter the shrine.

Whence or how

Love laid claim to this young life, it matters not now."

— Owen Meredith.

POUR or five days after writing to Clare, Mr. St. George went over to Claremont, and entering unannounced, found Mr. Vivien overwhelmed with grief, and sobbing like a child. An open letter lay before him; and without a word Mr. St. George seized it, and read with wildly dilating eyes, and throbbing heart,

### MY DEAR FRIENDS:-

It is my painful duty to announce to you, the sudden and terrible illness of your daughter. For the past twelve hours, she has been unconscious, and delirious. On Tuesday, I was called to her room, by a loud heart-rending shriek. When I entered, she was lying insensible on the floor: I called for aid, and it was some time before she was restored to consciousness; then, I observed for the first time an open letter, lying near where she had fallen, I picked it up and handed it to her, as she lay upon the sofa. She looked at it for a moment, with wide open, stony eyes, then slowly, piece by piece, tore it into minutest fragments. She was then perfectly conscious, for when I took the pieces and threw them into the waste-basket, she thanked me. But no other word passed her lips; and very soon after fever set in, and grew higher and higher, until at last she became delirious, and remains so still. Of what that letter contained, I of course know nothing;

but that she has had some terrible heart grief, I am quite sure. I advise you to come at once. In the mean time, with the help of God we will use every effort to save her.

Very truly your friend,
ADELE CAMPINAL.

When he finished the letter still holding it in his trembling hand, he looked down at the stricken father, who was staring up at him in dumb and hopeless misery.

"I had no right to read it," he said, in a broken, quivering voice, "but I feared so much, that I dared not ask."

Then laying his hand gently, upon Mr. Vivien's shoulder, he said:

"Do not despair my friend, while there is life there is hope; and Clare is very young. You will of course go to her at once, and her mother also; but where is she?"

As he spoke Mrs. Vivien who had been to Olney, entered the room. Seeing their unusual manner, she asked anxiously:

"What is the matter?"

Mr. St. George, handed her the letter in silence. When she had read it, the conscience stricken mother moaned aloud:

"Oh! my poor murdered child."

She knew at once, as Mr. St. George had known before her, what fatal news had reached her. The father alone was innocent and ignorant of it, and while he loved her more than either of the others, from having no torturing remorse, his grief was less acute.

"I will go home now, and make my arrangements to accompany you to New York," Mr. St. George said when leaving them.

"That is kind of you, Harold, and it is like you," Mr. Vivien replied, holding out his hand, which the other silently pressed.

When Mr. St. George reached home he sent for Annetta and told her the painful news.

"Oh, my poor bairn, my own darling," the woman shrieked, "she will die, I know she will die, and Annetta will see her no more! Oh, my God, have mercy; she is so young to die!" and swaying to and fro, she hid her face in her white apron and sobbed violently.

Mr. St. George, for a moment, looked on in grave silence, but at last said a little sternly:

"Annetta, this will not do; I am already halfcrazed with grief; have some pity for me, and listen to what I have to say." After a pause, he continued:

"I shall leave this afternoon for New York, and will remain there until she is better, or ——." Strong man as he was, a choking sob welled up from the depths of his heart, and he did not complete the sentence.

Again there was a pause, and Annetta's sobs alone disturbed the silence.

"I leave my child and everything else in your care," Mr. St. George said, with emotion.

"When I am gone, and not until then, tell the other members of my household why I have gone."

Then he turned and left the room to make his hasty preparations for departure.

After lunch, he took Réné in his arms, kissed her again and again, told her that he was going to leave her for a little while, and asked her to pray for him, and for her darling Clare. This was all he told her, and the little girl did not dream that her loved one, in that far city, was lying nigh unto death.

It was the morning after Mr. Vivien's arrival in New York, and as the doctor came out of the sick room, he asked in a despairing, anguished voice:

"Is there no hope?"

"Yes, there is hope, but it is better, my dear sir, to be prepared for the worst."

They were at Madame Campinal's, in a small parlor or sitting-room that opened into Clare's bedroom. Mr. St. George was present also. He was sitting with his arms resting upon a table and his head bowed upon them. Through the long, terrible night he had been there, almost in that same position. He had had no breakfast, and cared for none. He did not hear what they were saying, in fact he had no ears for anything but that mournful wailing voice, which, through the closed doors, came to him so distinctly. Sometimes she seemed a child once more, and talked of home and those innocent delights which only children know; but growing wilder, her grief seemed uppermost, and he heard her almost shrieking out:

"Save him, oh, my God, my beloved, my beloved. I tried to save him; save him, oh, my God." Then lower, but more touching still:

"My darling, oh, my darling, he never loved me! no, no, he never loved me! and I am so tired, so tired; pity me, kind Father, and let me die!" and with a low moan she was silent. Over and over again he had heard this, until his heart was torn with anguish. Feeling desperate, he got up with the determination of leaving the room, when Mr. Vivien motioned him to approach them. Seeing his haggard face, Mr. Vivien said, anxiously, "You are ill, are you not, Harold?"

"I am not very well," he answered, in a choked voice.

"You need fresh air and your breakfast, if I mistake not," the doctor said, looking at him intently; and added:

"You are a relative, I presume."

"No! not a relative," Mr. Vivien answered, "but a dear friend, and God willing he will soon be my son-in-law."

"Ah! he is then engaged to Miss Vivien."

"Oh! no, to my step-daughter, Miss Tremaine."

The doctor looked long at the pale handsome man, who seemed suffering so terribly, and thought,

"This is deep grief for a sister-in-law." Then turning to Mr. Vivien he said:

"In the next twenty-four hours we may expect a change; let us hope by God's mercy it may be for the better. I shall return in two hours; good morning."

"I will go in to my child now, Harold, and you go to your breakfast, or you will be really ill," Mr.

Vivien said kindly.

Of the two he was showing the greater fortitude, in these fearful hours.

When Harold St. George staggered out into the sunlight, he was compelled to call a carriage, as he was unable to walk, even the few squares to his hotel.

For the next twelve hours there was little change in Clare's condition; gradually she sank into a stupor from which it was difficult to arouse her, even to take medicine. Her father and mother seldom left her bedside, and Mr. St. George sat alone in the outer room, listening eagerly to every sound, and watching with mute inquiry, those who passed in and out so noiselessly. Each time the doctor had come out, he had answered that appealing look with the same words:

"There is no change."

But when the twenty-four hours had almost passed, Dr. Downing as he left, went up to where Mr. St. George was sitting almost stupified with grief, and laying his hand upon the bowed head, said in a cheering voice:

"There is some change for the better, and I have a hope that my patient will live."

"May God bless you for this hope," Mr. St. George said fervently and with such a light upon his face, as had not been there for days. Then grasping in his, the doctor's hand, he continued:

"If our darling is spared to us, I feel that we will owe her life to your skill and untiring care."

"My patient is in the hands of God, I am but

his humble instrument," the doctor answered reverently, as he left him.

After this Clare grew rapidly better, and before another day was ended, the doctor pronounced the danger passed.

Very soon she recognized her father and mother; and almost as swiftly as she had gone down into the deep dark waters, she came back once more to life and strength.

In two weeks from the beginning of her sudden illness, she was able to sit up and even to walk across the room.

She asked no questions, except if she had been long ill, and if her parents were sent for.

Both father and mother watched her narrowly, and were not satisfied with the weary, hopeless look, she brought back to convalescence.

Never in her life had Clare received such care and affection from her mother; and she was deeply touched by it. Poor woman, she would almost have given her life, to take from those young tender eyes, that dreariness of despair.

By Mr. St. George's request no one had told Clare of his presence in New York; but one morning when she was feeling better and stronger than usual, Mr. Vivien said:

"My child Mr. St. George is here, and would like very much to see you, if you think you are able."

"I can not see him father," she answered with agitation, "do not ask me to see any one, for I can not, oh! I can not."

"My dear, you know I will not insist upon your

seeing any one that you do not wish to; but I hope you will see Harold, he has been so very kind. Coming with us to New York, he has watched and suffered as we have; sorrowing at your illness, and rejoicing at your recovery, as if he were indeed one of us."

All the time he had been speaking her eyes were dilating wider and wider with some unspoken terror. At last she gasped out:

- "Was he here, in the room?"
- "Oh! no, he never saw you, but he passed the greater part of the time in the next room. You are exhausting yourself, my child," he said, seeing her unusual excitement.
- "Was I delirious with my fever?" she asked with forced calmness.
- "Yes, you were quite delirious for a little while?"
- "Did I say strange things," she asked, wild excitement in both voice and manner.

With fond intuition he read her heart, and answered gently,

- "You thought that you were a little child, and talked to me, oh, so sweetly, of a long-gone happy past."
  - "Is that all?" she asked again, eagerly.
- "All that we could comprehend," he replied; and if this slight prevarication was recorded against him, some pitying angel will surely blot it out.
- "Thank God!" she murmured softly, and, feeling faint, leaned back for support. Then, with a sweet, sad smile she said:

"I am sorry, father, but I would rather not see any one. Thank Mr. St. George for all his kindness to me."

Sadly disappointed, Mr. Vivien left his daughter, and went out to where Mr. St. George was waiting impatiently for her answer. He was to leave in the afternoon, and desired so much to see her before going.

As Mr. Vivien entered, he feared from his man-

ner all that he learned later.

"I am sorry," Mr. Vivien said at once, "but she seems unwilling to see any one."

Then sinking into the nearest chair, he groaned aloud:

"Oh, Harold, how could this great sorrow come to my child, and I not know of it?"

"Do you know her grief?" Mr. St. George asked,

with haggard eyes and trembling lips.

"I know no more than I have known for days; but some instinct tells me that her heart is broken," the father answered, drearily.

Up and down the room walked Mr. St. George, with quick and restless tread. At last, stopping beside his friend, he laid his hand tenderly upon his head, and said in a low, hushed voice:

"I pity you, Chester, even as I pity myself."

Mr. Vivien looked up at his friend, a vague wonder in his eyes, but only said:

"She told me to thank you, Harold, for all your kindness to her."

"May Heaven bless and restore her to perfect peace," Mr. St. George answered, fervently.

"I must be going now, Chester; you will bring her home with you, of course?"

"I think so," Mr. Vivien answered, and with a

long, warm hand shake they parted.

In a short time after Mr. St. George's departure, a lovely basket of flowers came to the invalid. Rarest roses, and all those sweet-scented flowers that she loved most. How well her heart told her whose offering it was, and for the first time since that cruel letter reached her, she wept bitterly and unrestrainedly, as she thought:

"He does not know the cruel misery he has doomed me to, and, God helping me, he never shall. He was so kind, oh, so fatally kind, that I hoped he would some day love me. Lulled to a false security, I did not fear that beguiling face, nor dream that she could win a thought from him, so much he seemed to fear and shun her. Ah, kind Heaven, have pity and help me to forget."

As time passed she grew more cheerful, and whether assumed or real, it comforted both parents' hearts, and when the doctor pronounced her perfectly able to make the journey, they proposed going home to her; but she insisted so persistently upon remaining, that in two weeks after Mr. St. George took leave of them, although not quite satisfied to do so, they returned home without her. Once more committing her to Madame Campinal's care, they had the lady's promise to write, should Clare have even the slightest relapse.

The motive she gave her father and mother for wishing to remain beyond the usual school term,

was that she might make up the time she had lost in her music, and complete one or two unfinished studies; but there was a deeper motive than this underlying her desire to remain.

They gave their consent reluctantly, feeling that she was utterly unable to pursue any branch of study, but with the hope that she would soon weary of it and realize the truth of their convictions, they bid her a tender good-by.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE COURAGE OF DESPAIR.

"Why should we faint and fear to live alone,
Since all alone, so Heaven has willed, we die.
Not even the tenderest heart and next our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh "
—Keble.

A T Olney Heights, in the past two months, marvelous changes had been wrought, both within and without the grand old house.

The wild, overgrown, picturesque grounds, that had been Clare Vivien's delight from childhood, were now the boast and pride of a landscape gardener. Beds of rarest exotics and brilliant hued colius were scattered everywhere; the grass grown walks, were newly graveled; and even the trunks of the old trees, were wreathed with flowering vines; but great as the change was here, within it was greater far. The grand salon, dining hall, morning room, and my lady's boudoir, were already completed, and were a blaze of splendor, with their lovely frescoing, mirrors, rich hangings and upholstery. In the vast house one place alone, remained untouched; and that seemed set apart and sacred to the master. It was the room which had been a home to him, since his return; where he had passed so many happy hours, with Clare, and his child, and where generations of St. Georges, from the old

wainscoted walls, looked down upon their last descendants.

The proud beauty, who was the destined mistress of all this splendor, although but a few days at home, had been to Olney Heights, and set the seal of her approbation, upon its almost miraculous changes.

"It is a home worthy of a princess," she thought, "and to be mistress here, who would not sell both heart and conscience. Yet for one mad moment, I hesitated, and would have let the golden sceptre pass."

Then visions of her coming triumphs passed rapidly through her mind, and he who was to place the crown upon her brow and the sceptre in her hand, was least of all in the kingdom of her thoughts.

Miss Tremaine heard of her sister's dangerous illness, from both Mr. St. George and her mother; and excused herself from going to New York, with the plea that she could do Clare no possible good, and to look on suffering always pained and unnerved her. Mr. St. George was shocked at this cold-blooded selfishness, in the woman he had chosen from all the world; but when once more in the glamor of her presence, she greeted him with such warm affection, listened with eager interest to every detail of her sister's almost fatal illness, spoke so sorrowfully of poor dear Clare, and looked so beautiful, that he tried hard to both forgive and forget; but there still lingered a fear, that her fairness hid from him a cold unfeeling heart.

Fly from the conviction as he might, he was

unhappy; and surely the misery he had brought to one young heart, and the worse than misery, of his doubts and fears of the other, were enough to make him so.

He felt himself to be growing daily more morose, and saw Maud Tremaine's only half concealed resentment of it, yet seemed powerless to change his mood.

"I shall hate him soon!" that young lady said one evening to her mother after she had been playing the high-handed tyrant with her lover.

"Beware my child," Mrs. Vivien said, in a warning voice, "experience has taught me, that only when men feel our chains, do they attempt to throw them off. Let yours be of roses, my dear, for unless I mistake him much, Harold St. George will wear no other."

"I have no fear," Miss Tremaine answered, with insolent hauteur, strong in her conscious beauty, and his manifested weakness.

But notwithstanding this assurance, Mrs. Vivien carried an anxious heart. "What if all my scheming should come to naught," she said to herself, and then a memory of Clare's haunting mournful eyes, came to her, and she felt that her punishment would be just.

Mr. Vivien since his return from New York, had been so much occupied with his invention, which he was about to patent, that he had little time for anything else; but that little he devoted to answering Clare's fond tender letters. He was growing far happier about her, as she wrote as cheerfully as of

old, and spoke always of her improving health and strength.

It was the last of July, when he wrote that he thought she had best come home, as he had done without her quite as long as he could, and received for answer a letter that drove him half mad. Its substance was, that after long and due deliberation, she had decided, provided he did not positively forbid, to prepare herself for the lyric stage; feeling that her life to be a happy must be an active one.

"I have been advised to attempt it," she wrote, "and good judges encourage me to believe I can succeed. To this end I have been devoting all my energies. I fear, my dear father, that at the first you will be deeply prejudiced against the step I wish to take; but I am confident that after you have given the subject sufficient thought, you will think as I do. Much as I love you, I feel that my old life at Olney would be insupportable; and besides I know that I could see you and be with you quite as much, for it is my dream, that one day my father may be with me always, and feel no shame, although I be upon the stage, in knowing me his child. I leave to you, my dear father, the task of breaking this news to my mother, knowing well, that your kind heart will prompt you to a wiser method than any I can use. If this letter pains you, as I fear, dear father, forgive me." She said but little else, and asked a speedy reply.

Mr. Vivien was too profoundly agitated to write, and he knew not where to turn for comfort. Once

more memories of that fearful illness came back to him, and he thought:

"The same heart trouble that almost took her life, is driving her to this rashness!"

Days passed of anxious doubt and thought, before he answered. He had not told his wife, hoping to be able to convert Clare from her wish and purpose, without her mother ever knowing that she had even entertained it. He was now so thoroughly aroused, so intensely absorbed, in interest for his daughter, that all else was forgotten, and he awaited her reply to his letter, with a disturbed and restless heart. Instinct told him with what tenacity she would cling to her purpose, and when her letter came, it pained, but surprised him not at all. It was really, from first to last, one tender passionate appeal. He felt it to be such, and suffered all the more keenly, from knowing so well, the pain which the only answer he could give her would inflict. She painted so fair a picture of those days to come, when they would be together, that one less wedded to his precepts and his faiths, would have been tempted to relent. But to Chester Vivien these sweet fancies, were only an added misery; feeling that they could have no realization. He pitied her so profoundly, and loved her so tenderly; but this thing which she desired, seemed in his thoughts little less than madness. Once more he wrote, consulting no one, more urgently and peremptorily, and asking her to name the day when she would return.

In reply, she wrote him a desperate despairing

appeal; ending with, "if you love me, you will not wish to deprive me of my only hope of happiness; for all that other women hope to find in love and marriage, I must find in my art."

This letter was too much for him to bear alone; he felt that she had gone beyond his powers of argument.

"I will see Harold," he thought. "He once had influence with her, and he must write to her. He will know how to say so well, much that I have left unsaid."

Acting upon this thought, it was not long before, almost beside himself, he was ushered into the library at Olney Heights. Mr. St. George was at his desk, deeply engrossed with books and papers. As his friend entered he greeted him pleasantly, asked him to be seated, and sat down near him.

Lookingly affectionately at him, he said:

"I am glad to see you Chester, but you look disturbed; what is it, old friend?"

"I have tried hard to manage it myself, Harold," Mr. Vivien answered sadly, taking out Clare's letters and handing them to him, "but the current is too strong against me, and I have come to you for aid."

Without a word, Mr. St. George read each letter through, and then, looking up sorrowfully at his friend, asked in a voice of so much anguish:

"What can I do, Chester?" that Mr. Vivien was touched anew, by this evidence of sympathy.

"Write to her, Harold," he answered, "bring every argument in your mind to bear, against this thing which she would do."

"I fear that she will heed me little," he answered, sighing deeply.

"Why do you say that, Harold? Once you had great influence with her, greater, perhaps, than any one else. For my sake and her own, write to her," the father pleaded.

"I will do as you wish, Chester," Mr. St. George answered. "Réné shall write also; they correspond regularly, and only yesterday she received a letter from your daughter."

When Mr. Vivien left his friend, he was feeling more cheered and hopeful than he had for days; but it was with sadly different feelings that friend watched him go.

Although he had said all he could to comfort the father, he was able to take but little to himself, and he thought:

"Should we succeed in bringing her back, with this restless, unsatisfied craving in her heart, what will be the end? Oh, most unhappy child, miserable wretch that I am!"

He bowed his head upon his desk, and shuddered in the impotence of despair.

"She has never answered my cruel letter, and no wonder. How dare I write to her again?" he thought, "and such a letter, too, as I must write. Am I destined to give her only pain? But I have promised, and however painful the task, I must perform it."

Feeling thus, he sat down at his desk, and letter after letter was written and destroyed, before one

of them seemed to him in any way fitted for its delicate and difficult mission.

Procuring from little Réné a sweet and affectionate letter, he enclosed it in his own, saying to himself as he did so: "It shall be a passport for mine," then with doubt and fear sent it on its winged way.

Promptly her answer came, one to himself, and one to his child. With trembling hands he opened his, and read:

MR. St. GEORGE,

KIND FRIEND,—Your letter of the twenty-eighth has been received, and I feel that I must thank you for the interest you manifest in my future, and your deep sympathy with my father. That both of you are sincere I can well believe.

You and I naturally view my intentions from such widely different standpoints, that I have no hope of converting you, to any faiths of mine; but I do not despair that I will yet win my father.

While his disapproval pains me greatly, something within me, that is neither genius nor ambition, yet has the strength of both, bids me be faithful to my purpose, and cheers me with the hope of victory.

I shall not act contrary to my father's wish. I may post-

pone, but will not relinquish my intention.

In conclusion, permit me to congratulate you upon your approaching marriage; that it may bring you all the happiness you now anticipate, is the prayer of your

Sincere Friend, CLARE.

"Oh, my God, what a mockery," he almost groaned. "All the happiness I now anticipate," he repeated.

"What do I anticipate? Am I not once more the deluded victim of a fanaticism that has closed my heart to all truth and purity, when not clothed with the ideal loveliness in which I have hoped to find them."

In fancy he saw again as he saw it first, that rarely radiant face. It seemed as faultless still, but he no longer felt that his happiness depended on its possession.

"Has it come to this, Harold St. George," he asked himself aloud, "when even the touch of a far-off hand can awaken into torturing conviction, a slumbering discontent?"

"Am I a man of honor?" he asked himself again, as he rose and walked vehemently to and fro. "A man of honor, yet false to its highest code. What would Clare think of me if she knew? Alas, if I mistake not, she already despises me for the weakness of all that is highest and best in man, and for the strength of all, she must have seen, I tried so vainly to resist."

Looking down once more at the letter he still held in his hand, he thought, "She is as cold as ice, poor Chester; I fear I have done you no good."

Calling for Réné, he gave Clare's letter to her, and helped her read it. The little missive was so sweetly tender, so utterly different from his, that for the first time he envied his child her trusting and returned affection.

With the hesitation of pity, several days passed before he took the letter to Mr. Vivien. He felt relieved and surprised that the father manifested no great disappointment.

"I am content, Harold," he said, "since she will

do nothing against my wishes; for the rest I have everything to hope."

When Mr. St. George left Mr. Vivien's study, he met Miss Tremaine and Mrs. Vivien in the hall. They told him frankly that the y had been waiting for him, that they might propose to him a trip to Newport.

"I have not taken a holiday for so many years, and Maud is really not feeling well; but she persists that she will not go unless you accompany us," said Mrs. Vivien, smiling at her daughter.

Maud Tremaine's bewitching face was turned to him in mute appeal.

"What can I say," he thought. "I have no reasonable excuse for not going, and yet no fancy for the trip." The drooping eyes took in his hesitation, but she only said in her sweetest and most caressing tones:

"I was so long away from you before, and so unsatisfied with it all, that I resolved to leave you no more."

It was true that through the summer she had seemed restless and disturbed; both mother and lover had observed it; and when she decided that to Newport she must go, and her mother with her, Mrs. Vivien offered few objections. Learning that Clare Vivien would soon be at home, she was far too wise to think of leaving Mr. St. George in any such possible danger; and when he went home he had given his promise to spend the month of August at Newport.

## CHAPTER XV.

#### DISENCHANTMENT.

"I need not say how, one by one,

Love's flowers have dropped from off Love's chain;

Enough to say that they are gone,

And that they cannot bloom again."

—L. E. Landon.

MRS. VIVIEN notified her husband of their intended trip, and soon after he sent the information to his daughter. He asked no final decision from her, but that she might come and solace him in his loneliness.

The result was proof that he could have chosen no wiser course, for he had been alone but a few days when Clare, true to the impulses of her heart, answered his affectionate appeal in person.

She knew where to find him, and walking straight into his study, he was in her arms before he knew that she had left New York.

Rapidly the days passed to father and child. They were so happy to be once more together in health; and never once did they allude to the subject that loomed up like a ghost between them.

Clare spent at Olney Heights all the time she could spare from her father. Réné, Celestine and Annetta met her always with such rapturous delight, that it was a pleasure to go there.

On her first visit, Annetta took her in her arms; and, holding her a little off, said proudly:

"My bonnie bairn, I knew that it would be so. You are handsomer than the other."

Clare's dark face flushed, for who that other was she knew too well, and saw at once that in this old friend of hers, the proud mistress of Olney Heights would have no partisan.

"Ah, it was a sad time, lassie," Annetta continued, looking fondly into the young face, "when I thought that these old eyes would never more be gladdened by the sight of you; but God was good."

Réné was happier than she had been since Clare said good-by to her long months before, and seldom left her, persisting in staying at Claremont when Clare could not be at the Heights.

Once only Clare had been through the splendid house.

"It is all so changed that I would not know it. It is so like an enchanted palace," she said to Réné, who had been telling her that these changes had been made to please the new mother, who was coming.

"I am afraid I will never love her," the child said dolefully, "but I will not tell papa, it would grieve him so."

"It is your duty to try to love your father's wife, my darling," Clare said, gravely, bending down and kissing tenderly the child's fair brow.

Only in the library did Clare feel, that she was again at Olney Heights. It was so filled with sweet and bitter memories to her; yet she loved to linger there.

"It will soon be a lost paradise to me," she thought, "let me enjoy it while I may."

As she stood in the deep recess of one of its windows, looking dreamily out upon the lovely lawn, with Réné's arms around her, few would have recognized in the stately handsome girl, the pale fragile one, of two years before.

She had no features in common with her beautiful half-sister; but there was a soul-ful beauty in her face, infinitely higher, and more winning, than all Maud Tremaine's dazzling charms.

In the soft brown eyes, were haunting shadows, of a passion, that had swept over her young life, like the breath of a sirocco; purifying with its fires, and ennobling, and calming, with its despair.

Yes! little as she knew it, or had ever hoped to be so; she was beautiful.

Not with Miss Tremaine's startling beauty, that compelled to instant admiration, all who beheld her; but with those surer and more lasting charms, that steal upon the heart and mind, and win men's highest and purest loves.

In form, she was her sister's equal; of the same height, more slender, and yet more stately; seeming taller even than she was; and the dark Murillo tinted face, was no mean rival, of that white loveliness, which had been fatal to so many.

Réné had been pleading with her for a song. She looked down at the little pleader, a smile of rare tenderness on her face.

"I will sing for you once, dear, and then I must be off," she said, leaving the window a little reluctantly and going to the piano. When the song was finished, Réné begged so sweetly for another, that she did not refuse, and had scarcely commenced to sing, when Mr. St. George in utter astonishment reached the library's open door; then stood quite still. The thrilling voice came to him, a memory of the vanished past. "In some other world, if not in this," he thought, "I must have heard that glorious voice;" and with all his soul and every sense alert, he listened, and dreamed not, who the singer was.

He was still unperceived even by Réné, and when the song was ended, the lady turned to the little girl and said sweetly:

"I can sing no more to-day, my darling."

Then kissing the child's pleading mouth, she rose, and turning to leave the room, met Harold St. George face to face.

Seeing him there, was so unexpected to her, believing him to be hundreds of miles away, that her heart gave a wild bound, and the very blood in her veins seemed turning into ice.

For one brief moment they stared at each other in speechless silence; more as foes would do who suddenly meet, than as friends long parted.

At the very first he did not know her, she was so marvelously changed; but one look into the beautiful eyes, that were still the same, added to the unforgotten voice, and he knew that his little Clare, grown into a graceful, lovely woman, stood before him.

Of the two, she regained composure first; and frankly extending her hand to him, said:

"This is a pleasure, Mr. St. George, as great, as it is unexpected."

Réné had possession of one of his hands, with the other he took Clare's, and bowing over it, said with visible agitation in his voice:

"I too, did not dream of the pleasure in store for me; and at first thought you a stranger; you are so unlike, and yet so like my little Clare."

"If the change be an improvement I had need of it," she answered, smiling brightly.

"In my eyes, and I am sure in Réné's, there was little need for improvement. Is it not so, darling?" he asked, looking tenderly into his young daughter's face.

"No one is so good or beautiful, as my own dear Clare," the child answered, impulsively, "and I love her, oh! I love her so much papa, that if she leaves me again, I shall go to the angels."

Bending down, Clare took the little girl in her arms and said, with grave tenderness:

"Réné, my love, never say that again, or you will break Clare's heart."

The child was awed and touched, by her manner, and she answered:

- "I never will, Clare, but you will let me love you all the same."
- "Certainly, my child, and live long to love me." So Clare answered, gently disengaging herself from Réné's clinging arms.

Mr. St. George was too deeply moved by this tender scene, to be able to control his voice, and said nothing.

Once more seeming perfectly at ease, Clare asked,

"Is not your return unexpected?"

"Yes, I have come home sooner than I expected to when I left."

She fancied that there was a shade of pain in his voice, but she asked again,

"Did my mother and sister return with you?"

"They did not, and may remain two weeks longer."

She was by no means dejected at this news, for while she would have been very glad to see her mother, she felt willing to deprive herself of that happiness, for a week or two, as it must necessarily entail Maud Tremaine's presence.

"I must say good-by," Clare then said, "as I have been away from my father all the morning, and he is growing quite jealous of you Réné."

"I shall accompany you," Mr. St. George said,

starting for his hat.

"Oh! no, don't this morning, you have made a long journey and you are tired," she said quickly, and almost brusquely.

He saw that she was in earnest in not wishing him to go, and with a pained feeling relinquished his intention.

On her homeward way she prayed:

"Help me oh! God, to hide from him the shame-ful truth, that I have loved and worshiped him unsought. Let me so act and speak, that if he has any knowledge of my weakness, he may forget that he has known, and live to deem himself mistaken."

She felt that she could have borne his presence

no longer with calmness; and while she regretted that her refusal to let him go home with her, gave him pain, did not regret the refusal.

In the evening Mr. St. George called upon Mr. Vivien, and after a time, as Clare did not come in, he asked for her, and found that she was not at home. After this he made two or three visits to Claremont, never once seeing her; and to his intense chagrin learned that each time she had been to Olney Heights, for Réné and Celestine. Once they had gone boating on the river, and the other times, had taken long walks through the woods.

That she was purposely avoiding him, he did not think, and redoubled his exertions.

Clare, seeing at last that all her efforts to avoid him would be useless, yielded quietly to circumstances, only girding on her armor of reserve, and self respect, until she did convince him that she had no memory left, of a weakness which might have been his glory and his strength.

In all their amusements Mr. Vivien took active part, and felt younger and happier than he had felt for years.

They dined "en famille," first at Olney Heights and then at Claremont; they rode, drove, went boating; and more than all they sang.

Mr. St. George with his old passion for music, never tired of listening to Clare's magnificent voice; and almost every day, it rang out clear and sweet, through the splendid vaulted rooms, at Olney Heights.

Becoming somewhat accustomed to the life that

she lived, it soon lost its first poignant pain. Not that she had come to think, that she could live it very long; for she knew that it must soon end, and that she would take up a new and entirely different one.

Of this new life, she had not yet spoken to her father. She had very little doubt of eventually gaining his full sympathy and consent; but dreaded to give him pain, seeing how happy and contented he seemed.

Poor man, he was blissfully deceiving himself with the belief, that she had given over all thought of it, in obedience to his wishes.

"I must remain and see them married, or the world will think strangely, and so, perhaps may they. It is the last sacrifice my heart need ever make to pride. After that," she thought with a bitter smile, "there will be little left for me to suffer."

Her mother and sister were now daily expected, but she no longer shrank from their coming, as at first. A chill leaden apathy, seemed to have stolen over her; and like one numbed by despair, who with closed eyes meets an inevitable doom, she waited for the approaching fatal day. She longed to be at rest, and felt that she could never be, while tortured daily by his presence.

"He is kind to me," she thought, "but, oh, Heaven! if he would only be kinder still, and stay away from me."

But stay away he did not, and, in truth, seemed never happy unless when in her presence; and a

tone of her sweet voice, or a touch of her soft hand, thrilled him as no woman's voice or touch had ever done. He had been mad and blind with passion, and lived to know that passion dead and worthless; but until then, had never felt that almost divine, pervading sentiment, which is perfect sympathy, appreciation, love, tenderness, all in one. Not that he had abandoned himself to it, for, as yet, he was unconscious of its full grown strength. He knew that he found in her his loftiest ideal of womanhood; that she was all he could ever hope a woman to be; and without pausing to consider that she was forever lost to him, a vague awe of fate and those circumstances that make it, held these feelings still aloof from passion's warmer glow.

Miss Tremaine came at last, and met her recreant lover with superb disdain.

"So, mon ami, tiring of me, you sought an older yet a brighter flame," she said, with coldest irony. "I thought, mon cher, that you had some better reason for leaving Newport than pure disgust and weariness of its gayeties."

In her heart, so capable of darkest treachery, she believed that he knew of Clare Vivien's return to Olney, although she was herself in ignorance of it, having heard from Mr. Vivien the day before her departure, an intimation that he feared Clare would not come home during the summer.

Mr. St. George did not reply to her at once, but looked intently at her, while flushing darkly, he said at last:

"I left Newport, Maud Tremaine, because I

could no longer witness your degradation, and not because I knew Clare Vivien was in Olney, for it was an unexpected pleasure to find her here."

The red lips curled scornfully, and the violet eyes flashed fire, as she asked, loftily:

"Do you mean to insult me, Harold St. George? By what am I degraded?"

"By a wanton and heartless flirtation, that made you the talk of Newport. You knew my meaning well, and had no need to ask," he answered, almost fiercely.

She had never been so angry with him, and had never come so near hating him, but Reason told her that she had gone too far already, and that the man who stood so haughtily erect before her, was little more than a chained and chafing rebel. One moment she paused to think, then hiding her face in her hands, sank upon a divan near, and sobbed hysterically.

It was not the first time that instinct had guided her right.

He regretted his harshness at once, and going up to her with even more kindness than she had hoped for, asked her forgiveness.

"She is a woman so fair, so tempted, I should have more mercy," he thought, and once more a hollow truce was made between them.

It was some days after this, before Mr. St. George again saw Clare Vivien.

It was evening, and other guests were present, chief among whom was her old admirer, Glen Trafton. He had been quite devoted to her since her

return, and Mr. St. George had not been able to stifle a feeling of resentment, at his occupying so much of her precious time.

That night, both men watched her curiously. Never had she been so radiant; and side by side with her beautiful sister, her worst enemy could have called her no less beautiful.

The greater part of the time being engaged in animated conversation, her face seemed glorified by the light of rare intelligence.

"Can this lovely and brilliant woman be the little Clare I have known and loved," both men thought, and their eyes followed her with delight. When she sang, unmindful of all present, both drew near to listen.

Never had her voice seemed so perfect, and she sang with all her soul, a song that one of them had loved, and in the old days sung with her so often. Why she had chosen it she did not know, unless it were to try her soul with a supremest torture. Mr. St. George came nearer to her; almost she could hear the beating of his heart. He had lost all memory of his surroundings, and saw only that tender, impassioned face.

If he had not known the whole truth, he knew it then; for it came to him with sweet, yet maddening intensity. When the song was ended, bending over her, he said, softly:

"That was a sweet memory to me, Clare."

There was a thrill of something in his voice that she had never heard there before; she dared not trust herself to look at him, and did not see the lovelight that was shining through his eyes.

Rising hurriedly, without a word, she crossed the room to where Agnes Trafton and Mr. Vivien were sitting.

It was some moments, before she regained her usual composure, and was once more sending bright flashes of wit through the room.

Miss Tremaine had been eclipsed, for the first time in her life, by a woman whose charms she had hitherto valued lightly. She sat moodily and haughtily silent, listening listlessly, to Mr. Trafton, who had approached her, and was making an effort to be agreeable. She was too restless, and too much enraged, to be able to feel interest in any ordinary conversation.

Under half closed eyelids, she watched furtively, the man who was so recklessly defiant of her claims, and seemed to have eyes and ears only for her brilliant rival; who, in truth, seemed armed with "every power to please."

Clare had dreaded this evening, more even, than she had acknowledged to herself, for she knew that she must see her sister and Mr. St. George together for the first time since their acknowledged relation, and although outwardly calm and self-possessed, she was inwardly wild with excitement.

That they were a strange pair of lovers, she could not help thinking, but did not trust herself to observe them very closely, and was only half conscious of Mr. St. George's absorption in herself.

The evening was almost gone, when he went over

to Miss Tremaine, and gave Mr. Trafton his first opportunity, to talk uninterruptedly to Clare.

Maud Tremaine did not sulk as many a better woman might have done, for far less flagrancy in a lover. She had had time for sober reason to master her passion of rage; and it was only in those rare moments when that passion was uppermost, that she forgot. She was in her most bewitching mood, all smiles and tenderness, and when he spoke, she looked and listened, with the same dewy softness in her lovely eyes, that he had seen there, when he wooed her first.

He listened with marked politeness to all that she said to him so airily, yet answered often at random; for he was not thinking of her, and all her witcheries passed unnoticed. He could not close his heart to the melody of one sweet voice which came to him across the room, and his eyes unconsciously wandered, to where its owner stood.

Miss Tremaine was not unmindful of those wandering glances, and when she rose to say good-night to the departing guests, a cruel, savage gleam replaced the tenderness, that had availed so little. The dinner party had been a success, but she felt that it was not due to herself that it had been so; and this to her, meant defeat. She saw Harold St. George bow over Clare Vivien's hand, such wooing softness in both look and manner, as were new and strange in him.

How she hated them, hated them with such deadly hatred, that had the power been hers, in that

moment of torturing rage, she would have consigned them to eternal misery.

Clare scarcely heeded Mr. St. George's tender good-by, and was conscious only of a wild wish to be once more alone; for little as Maud Tremaine thought it, the evening had been a miserable one to her, and of her triumph she knew nothing; having had but one thought or care, to act, and seem, what she was not.

Like one in a dream, Mr. St. George went home; but alas! too soon for his peace of mind, he awakened to the dread reality, and knew at last, that the woman to whom his life-long fealty was pledged, was nothing, less than nothing, to him. That they had no thought, taste, or aspiration in common, he had long known; but had not dreamed before, that no trace remained, of the ignoble passion which had led him so far astray. With overwhelming force, the whole truth of his position was revealed to him, and he saw no ray of light to guide him through his labyrinth of errors. Desolate, despairing, he sought to bury memory in sleep; but it was long coming, and when it did, distracting dreams, avenged his banished thoughts.

### CHAPTER XVI.

#### IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

"For all sad words of tongue or pen
The saddest are these: 'it might have been.' "
—Whittier.

MORNING found Harold St. George worn and haggard. With food untasted he left the breakfast-room, and sought seclusion in the library. Restlessly he walked the floor, thinking distractedly all the while; but there seemed no escape for him.

"Fool and madman, that I am," he said to himself, "ay! worse than madman, for the experience of those miserable years, should have saved me from this folly. Every true instinct in my nature warned me against this beguiling woman; passion alone, has once more led me to my doom. Ah, Heaven! why did I not know when it was not too late, that the highest, purest, truest love that man can know, was that which bound me to the dark-eyed child, who loved me, as child or woman never did, or will again. My darling, my darling, if you could know the agony I suffer, to feel that you are lost to me forever, it would be such vengeance as your gentle heart would never wish. Oh! my lost love," he cried aloud, "was it from this you would have saved me, even in the wildness of delirium? Had your pure soul read mine so well, that it knew hers would be no mate for it. You called me your beloved then, but now, your love is dead, and you would despise me if you knew the maddening truth."

Through the long day he battled fiercely with his fate, which seemed the blacker and more desolate from knowing what a heaven of love had been so near. "Too late, too late," ever these sad words were ringing through his brain.

To hide his misery he feigned illness, and saw no one. When he did come forth to meet his friends, the illness that was feigned, had left a genuine imprint; and when he plead it in excuse for his three days absence from Claremont, to Mr. Vivien and Clare; looking at him, they could not well doubt the truth of his statement. He stood, with his blond head, bared to the sunlight, and Clare fancied, that new lines had been graven, across the broad brow, and around the proud sensitive mouth, since they parted. The blue eyes seemed deeper and darker, and if she had dared give wings to her fancy, a heart's tragedy might have been traced.

They had come over on horseback; and Mr. Vivien, finding Mr. St. George something of an invalid, insisted upon his having his horse brought out, and taking a ride with them.

"It will do you good, Harold," he added, "for you look as if you had been having a tough time of it. If you will go we will gladly wait."

Clare said nothing, in fact she had not come of her own choice, but being out with her father, he had insisted upon it. She was mounted upon her superb black Arab, and was looking more beautiful Mr. St. George thought, than he had ever seen her. But he had always thought that she looked her best on horseback; she was so perfectly mistress of her horse and of herself, and with the ease of conscious power, sat firmly and gracefully erect.

The temptation to be near her was too great to resist; he accepted Mr. Vivien's invitation and went at once to order his horse.

They started off three abreast, and for a while conversed pleasantly.

Suddenly Clare bent down almost to the black mane of the spirited animal she was riding; patted her neck softly and said firmly, "Nox, Nox, we will have a run now."

Then straightening herself in the saddle, before Mr. St. George had even time to think of her meaning, she was off like an arrow from a bow.

Instantly, he started after her, and the horse he rode was no poor antagonist of her almost winged Arabian.

Mr. Vivien called after him that she was in no danger; but he neither heeded nor listened. At last he saw them around a bend in the road. Nox was restive and plunging wildly from her sudden halting. He rode up to them with staring eyes and a face like the dead; grasped her reins and asked:

"Clare Vivien, would you drive me mad?" in a voice of such pathos and passionate reproach, that she was startled, and answered him very gently:

"I thought you knew, Mr. St. George, that I often rode this way."

"How should I know?" he asked, and looked

so grave, so solemnly in earnest, that she could not resist her inclination, and laughed; a ringing joyous laugh.

It seemed ludicrous to her, that so slight a thing, should have moved him so much; and that innocent laugh, tore down a mountain of reserve, that had been between them.

Once more she seemed to him the gay, light hearted child, whom he thought was gone forever.

Forgetting all that could mar their present, they rode back slowly to meet Mr. Vivien, talking more unreservedly, than they had done, since that parting long before.

"Have you never heard of any of that girl's mad exploits, Harold, that this one should have alarmed you so?" Mr. Vivien asked as they approached.

"Never!" he answered, "and I thought I was familiar with her accomplishments as a horse woman."

"Before you came, she kept her mother and myself, as well as all the good people of Olney, in constant fear and apprehension; but I believe she did change wonderfully after she had you to ride with her," Mr. Vivien said, not heeding his daughter's blushing face. Mr. St. George saw it, and with innate delicacy seemed not to.

"I thought her horse was running away with her," he said, turning to Mr. Vivien, "and in truth I think there is danger in riding that way, even if the horse be under your control. This beautiful animal," he added, tapping lightly Nox's shining mane, "has too much fire and mettle, to be lightly tampered with."

"Ay! but she is true as steel to me, and I have no fear," Clare answered bravely; but she did not leave them again, and in their happiest mood, they rode back to Olney Heights.

Percy Dartmoth was again a regular visitor, at Claremont, and when Mr. Vivien and Clare reached home, they found him there.

The mother was watching anxiously this new caprice of her daughter. She had thought this man banished, for until the last few days, he had not been there since their return.

Clare was wondering and watching also; she knew that Maud Tremaine, was unworthy of the man who had chosen her, and felt that she was making herself still more so, by encouraging false hopes in the heart of a desperate man.

After this Mr. St. George made his visits oftenest in the evening, and saw Maud Tremaine alone very seldom. He met Glen Trafton often, and sometimes Percy Dartmoth. Both of them he treated with haughty politeness, but no more. With his betrothed he no longer remonstrated, feeling that he had no longer the right; but looked on hopelessly, knowing that the day drew near when he should sign his life away to direst misery.

Of the five who met so often, Clare Vivien was far the happiest, having already suffered the torture and passion of a great despair; she neither hoped nor feared, and felt that the future could bring her nothing worse than she had known.

Glen Trafton's love she plainly saw and deeply regretted, but did not see that other deeper, more despairing and more passionate love, the fair bud of affection, that day by day, and hour by hour, had strengthened, expanded, and bloomed at last into the master passion of a life.

Harold St. George believed that Glen Trafton loved her too, and, being only human, his heart was filled with jealous rage. For, lost as she was to him, the thought was maddening, that before his very eyes another might win her.

With impartial kindness she smiled on both, and sang to each of them their favorite songs; but there was no trace of coquetry in her manner, no thought of it in her heart. She had loved greatly and had lost. That no other love could come to bless her life she knew, but felt no sorrow or regret that she had loved, and looked with calmness on her desolate life, feeling that

"It was better to have loved and lost, Than never to have loved at all."

# CHAPTER XVII.

#### A RACE WITH DEATH.

"My heart turned sick, my brain grew sore,
And throbbed awhile, then beat no more:
The skies spun like a mighty wheel;
I saw the trees like drunkards reel,
And a slight flash sprang o'er my eyes,
Which saw no farther: he who dies
Can die no more than then I died.
O'ertortured by that ghastly ride,
I felt the blackness come and go,
And strove to wake; but could not make
My senses climb up from below."
—Byron.

DAILY Mr. St. George had grown more wretchedly desperate, and fearing almost to look at Clare, lest she should see his madness, he once more absented himself from Claremont, and did not appear again, until he was sent for to make one of a riding party, who were going over the mountains, to a lovely valley beyond, through which their own river passed in its winding course before it reached them. It was twenty miles away, and they were to be gone two days. The place was wild and romantic, with good fishing, and an abundance of game.

It had long been a resort for the people of Olney, and a tavern was kept there by a farmer for their accommodation.

There were twelve in the party, six ladies and six gentlemen. As they started out, Clare Vivien and Mr. Trafton led the way, and Miss Agnes

Trafton and Mr. St. George followed them. Miss Tremaine and Mr. Dartmoth were the hindmost couple.

All seemed to have brought to the excursion their gayest laugh and brightest smile, and none who caught the merry echo of their voices could have believed that care or discontent had lodgment in any of their hearts.

Clare Vivien was more than usually joyous, without herself knowing why. She did not dream that it was due to the presence of one who had been, and was still, very dear to her. She did not analyze the feeling, and did not hope, but simply put her despair behind her, and this bright September morning, almost forgot that Maud Tremaine stood in the gates of her paradise, and hid from her its light.

She was gay, witty, charming, and Glen Trafton was utterly bewitched. To every word she spoke, he listened with such rapture, that none who looked could fail to read.

Mr. St. George had thrown his smiling mask aside, and was growing more and more morose. The pain of death was in his heart as he looked at that angel face, and felt that it never could be his. He tried hard to make himself agreeable to his companion, but at last gave up the attempt, and for some moments rode on in silence. He was watching Nox closely, not liking her movements; she seemed irritated by something, perhaps her bit, he thought.

"Your Arab beauty is restless this morning, Clare," he said, at last.

"Yes, unusually so; but I think she will be over it soon," she replied, and nothing more was said on the subject, although Mr. St. George did not once cease to watch. The others were too much accustomed to Clare's fearless riding to notice anything unusual in either horse or rider, and were at any time prepared for some eccentricity.

They had gone about eight miles from home, and the road now passed through a thickly grown woods. Suddenly, the loud report of a rifle startled every ear. Nox gave one wild leap, and like the wind bore off her powerless and unresisting rider.

As quick as thought itself, Mr. St. George darted after them, for he alone of all her companions felt to madness her fearful danger. They knew what wonderful control she had over the animal she rode, knew that the mare had been trained to the noise of fire-arms, and had seen her do such mad and reckless things, that they did not doubt this was only another of her daring rides.

True, Glen Trafton followed them for a little while; but his horse was no match for their trained chargers, and he soon fell back with the rest, making an effort to feel amused at the way Mr. St. George was being deceived; but the effort was a failure, for, notwithstanding his confidence in Clare's superior horsemanship, he did not feel at ease.

A wild, agonizing fear was in Harold St. George's heart; he knew that not a mile away the road divided, the one leading to their destination turning to the right, and the other going straight onward to death and to destruction. Clare knew it

too, and felt how powerless she was to guide the frantic horse, having lost the reins at that first bound. She clung desperately to the saddle, and like one turned to stone, made no sound or movement. She saw where the roads forked, and then they passed it.

"Oh! God have mercy," she shrieked aloud, then closed her eyes and waited for the horror that was to come.

She did not heed the noise of advancing horsehoofs, but as one who dreams she heard that longloved voice calling aloud to her:

"Jump! Clare, for God's sake and mine! It is your last chance; release yourself from the saddle."

She heard, but made no effort to obey. Death's agony and darkness had swept over her, and the trembling soul awaited its release from the numbed and well-nigh senseless clay.

"Undo your hold, my darling," she heard the same voice shrieking in her ear; then a whirling, deafening noise, and the feeling that she was being torn with fearful violence from her saddle, and she heard and felt no more.

With one strong arm Harold St. George had saved her from an awful doom, and with the other held in check his rearing, foaming steed. Almost with more than mortal strength he seemed endowed, so great his fears, so wild his agony.

He had held his lifeless burden but a moment, when with strained, dilating eyes, he saw the riderless Nox make her last leap, into the black abyss beyond, and heard an awful wailing cry come from the frightened, maddened beast.

It was some moments before he was entirely master of his own horse. As soon as he was, he dismounted, and carrying the helpless girl to the shadow of a tree near by, laid her gently down.

"She has fainted, and no wonder! my poor darling!" he thought, then said devoutly and aloud:

"Oh, God, I thank thee that Thou didst give me strength and courage to save her." Then, kneeling down, he rubbed her cold hands, and from her brow smoothed the dark, waving hair.

But as the moments flew, and still there was no sign of life or movement, the horror of a great fear came to his heart, and in his anguish he cried:

"Clare, Clare! my darling, my only love, come back to me! Come back to me, angel of my life, my own true love!"

Once more he took her tenderly in his arms and held her against his tortured heart, kissed her cold brow and unresisting lips, and wildly called her by every fond, endearing name.

As if his anguish had power to call her even from the shores of time, slowly her eyes unclosed, then closed again, as if dazzled by the brightness. Softly and musically, as the sighing of a summer's breeze, she murmured:

"And this is Heaven."

Once more she looked; he was bending over her, a passion of tenderness in his eyes.

"My own, my love," again she murmured, and

her dark eyes were luminous and tender with the love so long repressed.

Heaven in his heart, delirium in his brain, lower he bent, until his lips met hers, in love's long rapturous, thrilling kiss.

"My love, my only love," he gently whispered, "God has given you to me for time, and for eternity."

His arms were around her, and closer and firmer he held her, as if defying man or demon to unloose his clasp.

She felt his warm impassioned kisses on brow and cheeks and lips; heard his fond endearing words, and remembered only that she loved him and had loved him long. In her mind there seemed no memory of time or space.

"If this be Heaven, it is so sweet to die," she said once more, unutterable tenderness in her eyes.

"My darling," he answered, holding her almost fiercely to his breast, "It is an earthly heaven, from which I swear, you never shall be banished."

As yet she had not moved; but now his passionate words, and glowing eloquent eyes, thrilled every pulse of her being, and quickened into life her dormant senses. Slowly she lifted her head and moved, as if to free herself.

- "I am not dead then, but have been dreaming," she said, in a low, hesitating voice.
- "No! no; not dead my love, nor dreaming either," he answered gently.
- "You did not love me; do I not dream that you do?"

"You do not dream; dearest, I love you, and have loved you from the first; but a madness which your pure mind can never comprehend, blinded me and hid the truth, until it was, alas! almost too late."

These words brought back with sudden force, the memory of past woe, and struggling to be free, she said:

- "Release me, Mr. St. George, you have no right to hold me so."
- "No right, my love!" he said reproachfully; "my own, my darling, you can not go, until with your own sweet lips you tell me, that even as I love you, I am loved."
- "Ah! Heaven, you have known long, how I have loved you; why ask of me this new humilation?"
- "Is it then, Clare, so humiliating to you, that you love me?" he asked in a low, pained voice.
- "Not that I love you; but because that love has been unsought."
- "How came I here?" she asked with sudden excitement, the strangeness of her situation but then dawning upon her. She looked around wildly and attempted to rise. He released her and assisted her to her feet. She swayed, tottered, and but for him would have fallen.
  - "Where is Nox?" she asked, excitedly.
- "You must sit down, my dear," he said; "you have not the strength to stand," and leading her gently to the tree, he seated her where she could lean for support against its trunk.
  - "Oh! tell me where is Nox?" she asked again,

"is she saved, or——" a fearful shuddering stopped her speech.

- "Until you are stronger, try not to think, my darling," he said, with tender compassion in his voice.
- "But I must think, and unless I know the whole truth I shall go mad; so much of that past horror has come back to me."
- "When you are calmer I will tell you all you need to know, my love."
- "Then tell me quickly," she pleaded, "for until I know the truth, however terrible, no calmness can come to me."

She stretched forth her hands to him imploringly; he took them in his own and looked down at her with grave and pitying fondness, as he said:

"I would prefer to tell you nothing now, dear, but as you think it best, that you should know all that has occurred, I can not any longer resist you. When I saw Nox give a fearful bound, and start on that mad run, with a wild fear in my heart, and a prayer to Heaven for aid, I followed, knowing well that my horse was trained to fleetness greater even than your own; I knew your awful peril, and my agony was greater than any words can tell you. The race was brief but maddening. It was for life; a life dearer than my own. Heaven winged my horse and nerved my arm, to draw you back to life and love, almost from death's embrace. I tore you from your flying horse, and in a moment more, saw her make that last wild leap, and heard her fearful death cry."

"Oh! Nox, my poor Nox," Clare cried in anguish, and sobbed so violently, that he took her in his arms and vainly tried to comfort her.

"Oh! Nox, Nox, I loved you so, and to think that you should die, and die so dreadfully," she said, then shuddering with the horror of a doom that had passed her by, she wept more bitterly still.

"Clare, dearest," Mr. St. George said at last, "can you not rather thank God for your own life preserved? He has been very merciful to both of us."

Lifting her eyes reverently to Heaven, she answered in a trembling voice:

"I do thank God and you, that I did not die with my poor Nox, but none the less, do I mourn her untimely end. Let me go to her at once."

"Do nothing of the kind, Clare, I beg of you; the sight would only torture you; and besides you are not able to make the descent."

All his efforts to persuade her were in vain. She still insisted that she must go. Seeing that her own joys and sorrows were forgotten, and that she had no thought but for the dead beast she had loved so well, with the hope that it might bring her calmness and resignation, he relented, and rising, assisted her gently to her feet. Looking down at her, tenderly and protectingly, he said:

"We will go, dear, since you wish it," and, taking her arm, he guided her down the fatal path. They had no great distance to walk, before they stood upon the very brink of the yawning chasm.

Clinging to Mr. St. George's arm for support, Clare peered down into its black and awful depths. Some mighty upheaval of nature seemed to have rent in twain a giant mountain, and the rocky, almost perpendicular, sides of the terrible abyss, were well nigh barren of vegetation. To its lowest depths the sun rarely or never penetrated, but a stream of water rushed through it, and flowed on to the river beyond.

Where they were standing had long been known as "The Devil's Leap," and from childhood Clare had been familiar with its wild, dark legends, and shuddered always at the sight of it, so little dreaming of this tragedy which was to come.

As she stood, giddy and almost breathless, peering downward, she heard the roaring waters as they rushed over the fall at the head of the ravine, saw huge ledges of rock, and here and there a struggling shrub, but no trace or vestige of the ill-fated Nox.

"The rocks hide her from our view," Mr. St. George said, softly.

Then seeing that she was shuddering fearfully, he led her gently away.

The path turned here abruptly, and passed along the edge of the cliff, to where winding steps, partly natural, led to the very bottom of the abyss, and the wild grandeur that rewarded their efforts had tempted many to the descent. There were few people in Olney or the country around it, who had not, at some time in their lives, stood in the dark valley and looked upward to the light.

When Clare and Mr. St. George reached the steps, he asked:

"Will you let me go alone, dear, or do you wish to go also?"

"I will go," she answered, sadly.

She had made the descent before, and had no fear of it now. Only one great horror had possession of her, the sight that must meet her there.

Slowly he assisted her down the rugged, uneven way; and when they reached the bottom, almost carried her to where the mangled, bleeding Nox lay dead. In that frightful death-leap she escaped the rocks, but every bone seemed crushed. She was partly in the water; and although Mr. St. George tried to prevent Clare doing so, she knelt down on the damp, shining earth beside her, and once more sobbed wildly.

All this time Mr. St. George had not thought of those who followed them, but now he heard the far-off sound of human voices calling wildly, and knew that even worse than the awful truth was feared by them.

A moment more, and down the rugged steps he saw a man descending rapidly. It was Glen Trafton, who, hatless and almost breathless, rushed past him with frantic haste, and knelt beside the weeping girl, who was still calling mournfully to her poor, dear Nox.

"Oh, thank God, my darling, you are safe," Glen Trafton said, and bowing his head upon the cold hands that he had taken in his, with the violence of his emotions his whole form shook and trembled.

Clare looked at him a little while, with a vague,

weary wonder; then, drawing her hands away from him, she rose to her feet.

As Mr. St. George had hoped, she was calmer, but still trembled violently. He had been standing with closed lips and folded arms watching this scene, and he now stepped up to her and said:

"Take my arm, Clare, you are not strong."

With the trusting simplicity of a child, she obeyed him.

Mr. Trafton rose also to his feet, and holding out his hand to the other man, said, huskily:

"I know that you must have been the instrument in the hands of God, to save this dear one, and for my own life, I could not thank you half so much."

One moment Mr. St. George hesitated, and as he took young Trafton's proffered hand, Clare felt the arm on which her own was resting, tremble convulsively, and tighten its hold on hers, as if fearing that he might lose her.

In truth there was in his heart, in the midst of all his gratitude to Heaven, a bitter rebellious feeling, at any man daring to look like this one, and thank him for an act, that had it been less well performed, his life as well as hers had been the forfeit.

"I never dreamed of your danger Clare," Mr. Trafton said again, in a trembling voice, and looking down at the young girl fondly, "I thought that you had only taken that time for another of your old rides; but for all that, having always feared for you, when you have seemed so daring, I followed you, until I saw that it was useless, and then fell back with the others. But I could not feel content, and

watched anxiously for your return, or to come up to you waiting. We passed the fatal path that brought you here, and rode on a mile, two miles, and still no sign of you. At the first house I halted, resolved to know if you had passed; and heard Miss Tremaine calling to me,

"'Do not be alarmed Mr. Trafton, it is only a playful ruse of my sister's and Mr. St. George's to win a tête-à-tête.'

"Still my fears were not allayed, and hallooing loudly, a man came out, who told me that no such persons had been seen, and without being seen they could not pass.

"At once the horrors of this dreadful chasm, loomed up before me, and without an instant's pause, fast as my horse could carry me, I have come, alas! too late for more than, had I found you dead, to die with you."

As he spoke the passion of years was shining through his eyes; and when he stopped, Mr. St. George felt Clare shudder, otherwise she made no movement and no sign that she had heard; but cold, pale, still, with a far-off, solemn look in her mournful eyes, she leaned heavily on his arm, and but for his support, would have fallen.

"Do not question me now, it is no fitting time or place," Mr. St. George said, in a constrained voice, seeing the questioning look on Mr. Trafton's face.

Then turning to Clare, he said very softly:

"I am going to find you a seat, little one," and led her to a shelving rock near by, took off his coat, laid it over it, and bade her be seated.

"I do not need the coat," she protested, but seeing that he was firm, sat down passively. Mr. Trafton offered his coat also, but Mr. St. George peremptorily declined it, saying:

"One is quite enough, and beside Trafton, you will need yours, as I think I shall have to ask you

to go to the nearest farm-house for assistance."

Then very tenderly he said to Clare:

"Would you not prefer to bury your dead here, and as soon as we can?"

A low sob, was her only answer, and he continued:

"It will be very difficult, almost impossible to remove poor Nox, and I think you could find no more fitting burial place."

She lifted her solemn tender eyes and said sadly:

"Let it be as you think best."

There was a great longing at his heart, to take her in his arms, and woo her from her grief; but instead he turned away from her and asked Glen Trafton, if he would not go to the nearest neighbors, and find men and the necessary implements for digging a grave.

"Yes, certainly!" Mr. Trafton answered, "I too think it will be best to bury Nox before we go.

Clare will be better satisfied."

He started off at once, his honest heart full of gratitude to the man, whom he thought kind and thoughtful as a brother to the woman he loved. When he reached the top of the cliff once more, he saw the whole party that he had left behind him in his flight, approaching. The sound of their

voices had already warned him that they were near.

"Oh! Glen, for God's sake tell me is she safe?" his sister shrieked to him.

"She is saved and by almost a miracle I believe," he answered, in a solemn voice.

Agnes Trafton fell upon her knees; the others followed her and joined in devout thanksgiving to God, who had been so merciful. It was a touching sight, and when they rose to their feet, there was not one dry eye among them. Even Maud Tremaine, for once in her life was moved to unselfish tears. Death was so terrible to her, and it had come so near.

# CHAPTER XVIII.

## THANK HIM, AND BLESS HIM.

"Joys,

Zest

Itself is salted with a taste of woe;
There's nothing comes to us may not be borne
Except a too great happiness."

-Owen Meredith.

NOT an hour after the riding party left, Joseph came in from the barn and asked Mr. Vivien how long Miss Clare would be out.

Mr. Vivien saw the man's disturbed look and questioned him as to why he asked.

"To tell the truth Mr. Vivien," he answered, "the mare has a slight abrasion on her back. When she was turned loose in the pasture yesterday, she must have snagged it some way, while rolling. When Miss Clare sent to me this morning for her, I knew what a disappointment it would be, if I refused to let her go; and as the wound was not serious, I put the saddle on in such a way that it would only rub it slightly if at all, and sent her around. But I should not like Miss Clare to take a very long ride, as it might aggravate the sore, and make a troublesome wound."

"You distress me greatly, Joseph, by what you say, for my daughter has gone to Elkton Valley, and will not return until to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh! dear, dear," the man said, really dis-

tressed, "why it is full twenty miles away; I fear she will be ruined. If I had only known Miss Clare was going so far, I would never have sent the mare to her."

Mr. Vivien felt troubled and anxious; but when Joseph left him, tried hard to banish what he had heard from his mind.

The black beauty was Joseph's pet and pride, loving her almost as well as the young mistress who adored her, and the morning proved a sorry one to him. He could not help feeling remorseful, that he had saddled her at all.

"I had better have disappointed Miss Clare, but then who would have thought of a ride like this," he said to himself; and thus alternately tormenting and consoling himself, time passed.

Being anxious he was the first to hear and see the approaching party, and rushing from the barnyard, he reached the gate, as Mr. Vivien, disturbed by the sound of voices and the noise of wheels, opened the front door.

Joseph saw Clare seated in a wagon, and at once looked around for Nox. Seeing her nowhere, his fears came back redoubled, and he asked excitedly:

"Where is Nox?"

Clare sat pale and silent.

"Where is Nox?" he asked again.

"We have had a terrible accident, Joseph; thank God with us that our dear Clare has been spared," Mr. St. George said, in a low solemn voice.

A look of terror came into the man's face, as he asked again, almost in a whisper:

"Where is she?"

"Dead," Mr. St. George answered.

With one deep groan, Joseph covered his face with his hands and sobbed like a child.

"I am to blame, oh! my beauty, my pride," he cried out, as Mr. Vivien reached the gate.

Mr. St. George had by this time lifted Clare from the wagon; she staggered to her father's arms, and once more gave way to her grief. Mr. Vivien saw that something was wrong, terribly wrong; but he knew that his darling was safe in his arms, and knowing that, he was strong to bear whatever evil tidings they might bring him.

He looked around with mute inquiry, saw Joseph's evident sorrow, and asked in an anxious voice:

"What is it, Harold?"

Mr. St. George had dismounted, as also had Miss Tremaine and Mr. Dartmoth, and as Mr. St. George answered:

"I would prefer to tell you in-doors, Chester;" the party rode away.

Mrs. Vivien, who had only now become aware of their return, met them at the door with anxious inquiries, to none of which she received an answer. Mr. Vivien walked straight into the sitting-room with one arm still around his daughter.

"Let me lie down, father," Clare said faintly, and almost fell upon the lounge to which he led her.

"Are you ill, my darling?" he asked quickly,

in an agitated voice; "you are hurt, you have fallen, or been thrown."

"Oh! no, father, I am unharmed and only weary, and oh! so tired," she answered.

But Mr. Vivien was not satisfied, and extremely excited, turned once more to Mr. St. George for explanation.

Mrs. Vivien was sitting by the lounge at her daughter's head, almost as much excited as her husband.

"Sit down, Chester," Mr. St. George said gently, as he placed a chair for him near Clare, and one for himself beside it. Mr. Vivien when seated took his daughter's hand, and looked fondly and anxiously into her face.

"As she has herself said, Clare is unharmed," he heard Mr. St. George saying, and murmured, "My God, I thank Thee."

"She has been in great peril," Mr. St. George continued, "but by God's mercy she has been saved from it, without even a scratch or bruise. We had gone little more than five miles, when I noticed first, that Nox seemed restless and uneasy. I spoke of it, but Clare thought it would soon pass off. I was, however, not satisfied, and fancied that the mare grew worse instead of better, and was about proposing to examine her, when at the loud report of a rifle in the woods near by, Nox, with one fearful bound, started off at lightning speed."

Both father and mother, groaned aloud, and Clare listened with closed eyes and trembling lips.

"Fast as my horse could go, I followed," he con-

tinued, "almost I seemed to fly. I saw them take the path which leads straight to that awful chasm, and knew there was but one hope left. In my terror I called wildly to her, to free herself from the saddle, it was her last chance; feeling that even a chance for life was better than that terrible certain death--"

Mr. St. George stopped, choked with emotion; Mr. Vivien was on his knees by Clare's side, with his arms around her, and Mrs. Vivien was sobbing wildly.

"You did jump, darling," Mr. Vivien said huskily, and in his eyes his daughter saw all the agony he felt for the peril she had passed. Gently she dis-

engaged herself, and rose to a sitting posture.

"No! father, I did not jump," she said in a low, unsteady voice. "Like one turned to stone, I heard him calling to me, 'to jump, to free myself from the saddle.' I knew his meaning, but had no power to obey; and but for his strong arm, would not now be here;" she shuddered slightly, but went on, "I felt that I was being dragged with fearful violence from my saddle, then all was darkness, and I knew no more. When my eyes again unclosed to life and light-" she paused, and a faint flush mounted to her pallid cheeks, as she continued, "I saw bending over me, with kind solicitude, the man who, by the grace of God, with marvelous daring and at peril of his own life, had saved mine. Thank him and bless him, father, as I have not, and as I fear I never can." As she said this, exhausted she sank

back, once more; and Mr. Vivien's arms were instantly around Harold St. George's neck.

"Oh! my dear Harold," he cried, "what can I say to you? I have loved you always, but now that you have brought back to me, from that cruel death which would have taken her, my only child, words have no power to tell you, what is in my grateful heart."

"Say nothing, Chester," Mr. St. George answered, deeply moved. "I feel that I could not have lived to bear you different tidings; for you can not love her more than I do, love her as you may."

There was such grave earnestness, in both tone and manner, that Mr. Vivien looked at him curiously. Grasping his hand, he shook it warmly and said:

"God bless you, Harold; as both boy and man, you have been always the most royal friend man ever had."

Mr. St. George's face was still aflame with the love he had dared so openly to avow. Mrs. Vivien saw it; had heard only too well what he had said, and in her heart, there was a pained, miserable feeling, that all was not as it should be. Clare had heard him too, and through all its pain, her heart thrilled at the new, sweet meaning of his words. She had loved so long, and loved so much; what wonder, that for one blest moment she forgot, that he was not her own; but all too soon the torturing truth came back, and through such anguish as only women feel, who love unwisely and in vain, she saw

her loved one going, with no wish or hope, even if she had dared, to detain him.

"I am going now, but I shall come again tomorrow, Chester," Mr. St. George said, as he rose, and bending over Clare, very tenderly he laid his hand upon her head and looked down into the shadowy, fathomless eyes, with unutterable longing and love. He bowed to Mrs. Vivien, and without a word more left the room.

Instantly both father and mother knelt beside their child, and lifted their hearts in silent gratitude, to Almighty God, who in His providence, had seen fit to spare them from a great sorrow.

## CHAPTER XIX.

#### UNLOVED FETTERS.

- "O rank black pool, with one star's imaged form!
  - O sweet rich hearted rose, with rot at core!
  - O summer Heaven half purpled by stern storm!
  - O lily with one white leaf dipt in gore!
  - O angel shape, wherever curves and clings
- The awful imminence of a devil's wings!"

-Fawcett.

N the day following, as he had promised, Mr. St. George presented himself at Claremont, and asked after the health of the family, but called for Miss Tremaine alone. He had come this morning to do a thing, that he felt it would be madness, longer to leave undone. His face was very pale, but in his eyes, there was a resolute defiant look, that seemed to challenge fate. He knew that this duty which he must perform, not only for his own sake, but for the sake of one dearer than life, was a something most unusual.

He was a gentleman, with all fine, generous instincts, and when Miss Tremaine entered with a more than usually sweet smile of welcome, and offered him her hand, it was not strange that he should feel both shame and hesitation.

When they were seated, there was an awkward pause. She had learned to read his face too well, to doubt for a moment, that something of grave import lay behind it.

For days she had dreaded, she knew not what, and now did not seek to ward it off, as she could do so well, but waited in passive silence for whatever it might be.

Although he hesitated, he was too entirely frank to long with-hold thoughts that were uppermost in heart and brain.

"I have known, Maud, for months, that we were unsuited to each other," he said, and his voice was low and tremulous; but she saw no trembling in the eyes that met hers so unflinchingly, as he continued, his voice growing stronger with each word:

"I have felt, too, that some motive far removed from love had led you first to listen to my vows, and at last accept my marriage offer. That my punishment is just, I do not for a moment doubt or question. Forgive me, but I loved you for your matchless beauty, and neither knew, nor sought to know, aught of that immortal part of you, that alone could be my life's companion. For even these charms, that I have never seen surpassed, and rarely equalled, must fade with the passing years; but that other and better part of you, Time neither dims nor blights; unchanged, it lives on to the grave, that is but a gateway through which it passes to another and fairer life. Think, then, what madness it would be, to yoke two souls so widely sundered by every taste, emotion, or sympathy, that can inspire our actions."

He paused, as if for a reply, and looked down questioningly at her pallid face and downcast eyes;

but no answer came, and, indeed, she made no sign that she had even heard.

The very foundations of her life seemed moving from her, and leaving her in wildest chaos, with no anchorage to grasp, and no light to guide her. She had expected something most unpleasant, but of this mad revolt, this insolent daring, she had not dreamed, and was, in truth, stunned and amazed into silence.

Her hands clasped and unclasped a little nervously, and there was a slight twitching now and then of the firmly-closed lips; but she did not look up, and he went on, feeling sorrow at her displeasure, yet feeling also that he could give her no pain half so great, as that which she must feel in an unloved marriage. But beyond all thought of her or of himself, was the memory of a pure, proud face, and two soul-lit eyes, that had looked such passionate tenderness into his.

"I feel that I have merited your deep disgust, and scarcely hope to be forgiven, for having offered you a love so unworthy your acceptance."

Again he paused, but she was silent still, and he continued:

"But I beg you to believe, and call Heaven to witness, that when I offered you my heart and name, I was sincere, and felt that you alone of all womankind, could make life blest to me. I was blind and mad, with the desire to make your beauty mine; and with the rashness of a passion that I blush for now, asked you to be my wife; but I

have lived to know that you do not love me, and to feel content that it is so."

"You have said quite enough, Mr. St. George," Miss Tremaine said, in slow, measured tones, and

lifting her eyes haughtily, she continued:

"I understand you well, and know that it is not so much that I do not love you, as that you love another. You have dishonored me by your vile proposal, and now would heap dishonor upon dishonor, by seeking to forfeit all your vows; and, let me tell you, that the restitution which I demand is, that you make me your wife."

These words were hissed between her almost closed lips, and a demon of rage was in her heart,

and blazing through her eyes.

"You do not, cannot mean this, Maud Tre-maine," Mr. St. George said, shocked beyond all expression.

"I do mean it," she answered.

"Not when I tell you that I do not and have never loved you truly, and know that you loved me not even half so well. But more than both of these, I love another; I own that it is true, and love her so tenderly that life without her would be a mockery."

He was startled by a wild, discordant laugh. "She is mad," he thought, and she thought that he was madder still, to sit there with those burning words upon his lips, fond incense at another's shrine, and dare to hope for mercy from her.

"Do you for a moment think, that if it stood between me and any end or aim, I would pause to consider your happiness, when it is less to me than the lightest breeze that fans my brow?" she asked, with cold disdain.

"Can this be the woman to whose worship I have well-nigh sacrificed myself?" he thought, but

answered in a steady voice:

"You are mercilessly candid, Miss Tremaine, but I deserve it, and ask no mercy for myself, but for one purer and more innocent than either of us. She loves me, all unworthy as I am. How I know this, or why, I need not say; but it is no vanity in me to believe, that I alone can make her happy. But, to do this, I must be freed from vows that bind me only in form."

"Why, then, this waste of words?" Miss Tre-

maine asked, haughtily.

"Because you know well that Clare Vivien will never listen to my love, until I am freely and honorably released by you."

"I know nothing of the kind, never having formed so lofty an opinion of the lady as yourself, and do not doubt that she has already listened, not once, but often."

"Then you wrong her greatly. Once only I have spoken; when her spirit was almost free from the mortality that now enslaves it, I told her all my love, and when I speak again, it must be as a free and honorable man."

"If this freedom is to come from me, I warn you that your hopes are vain, for while I live, I never will release you."

There was a ring of triumph in the cold, hard voice. She felt that she had grappled his fate with

hooks of steel, if Clare Vivien were indeed the woman he believed her.

Mr. St. George had risen to his feet, and now stood looking at her, icy contempt upon his lips and indignation in his eyes.

"So," he said, "you would force me to make you my wife, against every instinct of your own heart and mine. If reason did not tell me that you are altogether human, I should be tempted to believe you something else." Then a vision came to him of that fair and winsome lady in the olden time, who wooed the wise Merlin to his ruin; and in his present mood, he would have scarcely felt amaze at any transformation of the incarnate loveliness before him.

A low, rasping, almost fiendish laugh, recalled him to himself.

"Ay! you are right," she said; "I am human only, and no demon aids me, or else, my lord, I fear you would to-day fare ill. For know, Harold St. George, that I hate you, and Clare Vivien also; and if by lifting this right hand I could bring happiness to both of you, I would see you die of misery, and still not lift it. From the hour she was born I hated her, and never sought to win her love. She has found no good in me, and has been pleased to distort the evil. As a child I was so jealous of my mother's love and care for her, that, sometimes in my rage, I could have killed the tiny, wailing creature. Until she came, I reigned supreme in every heart. Since then my mother's love has been divided, and to father I have been less than nothing.

Knowing this, need I tell you that as the years passed on my hatred grew; and now you ask for mercy, where there is no mercy."

He shuddered, scarce knowing why, and a great wonder came to him, that anything so beautiful was ever formed except to bless. An angel form, inspired by demon instincts, she no longer seemed the woman he had wooed with maddest passion, but a being removed from human sympathy by the very majesty of her unblessed charms. Long he gazed, as if under some weird and wondrous spell; and stripped of all ideality, his misguided life confronted him. He saw himself as never before, and knew that only his own fanaticism with the glamor of an esthetic taste, had hidden from his truer sight, a coarseness and sensuality for which he loathed himself, in this hour of humiliation. Unmindful of the gem within, he had sought perfection in the casket only; and he felt that no punishment could be greater than he deserved.

At last he broke the silence by asking if he had her final answer.

"Yes! my final answer," she replied, rising to her feet, and lifting her head haughtily.

"Then be it so," he said, as haughtily defiant; both duty and conscience bade me come to you first; and I do not regret having done so; but you cannot force me to marry you. For the rest, you can do your worst." He bowed himself out of the room, and left the house, feeling in no mood to see either Mr. Vivien or Clare.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A THIRST FOR VENGEANCE.

"Revenge is now my joy! he's not for me

And I'll make sure he ne'er shall be for thee."

-Dryden.

WHEN Mr. St. George left Maud Tremaine, for a moment she stood quite still with clenched teeth and hands; then with the fury of a pythoness rushed up and down the room. Around her she saw her shattered dreams, the airy imagery of a vain ambition, and hissed through her clenched teeth,

"I have pawned my soul to the evil one, that I might be mistress of Olney Heights, and now in one rash hour, with the passion of the brutes have lost it. Why did I let him see my heart, I who have feigned so much, could well have feigned a little more. He does not love me, but I have known that always, and doubly hated him, for the knowledge. If I could have had time to think, or had my anger cooled before I spoke, my rôle should have been so different, I should have wooed him at least to pity and remorse, thus forging anew, the chains my passion has unloosed.

"But even now it may not be too late," she said to herself excitedly. "I will go to father, and to Clare, and pour into their listening ears, such a tale of woe and grief, as must steel their hearts against him. Then I will recall him, and with the witchcraft of a beauty, that even he does not deny, will once more woo him to his allegiance. When I have sought to win, I have not failed; why should I now? but if I do," she thought, grinding her white teeth, "I swear Clare Vivien shall never be his wife."

Very soon, a most unusual thing for her to do, she opened the door of the sitting-room, and entering softly, approached Clare, who was lying upon a lounge, listening intently to her father, who was explaining the uses and mechanism of his new machine, which was now completed.

She asked blandly after her health, and if she had experienced no bad effects from yesterday's terrible accident.

She was in such a softened mood and was so entirely sympathetic, that as Clare answered:

"None thank you, except unusual languor," she could not help feeling a little remorse for past opinions, and thought,

"Perhaps father is right in thinking there is some latent good in her; but if I have been unjust, I have certainly done her no harm."

Added to these thoughts, there was a fear, that her jealous heart might have led her to magnify the evil she had seen, and for the first time in years, she felt genuine charity for her beautiful half-sister.

When Mr. Vivien took the machine to his work room, that was next the one they were in, and Maud Tremaine fell upon her knees before her, and plead wildly, for her breaking heart, her desolate, forsaken life, and painted in glowing words, all that she might become as the wife of the man she loved; told her that she had won from his allegiance, her betrothed, and that on her alone rested all her hopes of happiness, she was startled, amazed, indignant, but not wholly incredulous as she might have been twenty-four hours before.

"Get up, Maud, I do not wish you to kneel to me," she said calmly, rising to a sitting posture. "If you think I have aught to do with Mr. St. George's annulling his engagement," she continued, "you are mistaken."

"He has asked you to marry him," Miss Tremaine said adroitly.

"He has done nothing of the kind, and so far as I know, never intends to. My own life plans are made, and they are widely different from anything like that. Before I returned to Olney, I had decided to go upon the stage, and now, am only waiting for my parents' consent; and I have a hope that it will not be long withheld."

Notwithstanding Miss Tremaine's apparently deep grief, at this she laughed loud and long. At length she said:

"It is I who should be an actress, and not you, for I was born one; and it is easier, far, to seem what I am not, than what I am, provided always that the rôle be brief; but you, Clare Vivien, have no quality that could fit you for the sphere."

The young girl flushed slightly as she answered: "Better judges than yourself have thought quite

differently. I have been preparing for the lyric, and not for the dramatic, stage."

"Ah, pardon me; I had forgotten that wonderful voice," Miss Tremaine said, and laughed sarcastically.

Without appearing to observe the sarcasm, Clare replied:

"I have no reason to think it wonderful, yet have sufficient confidence in it to attempt the career I have chosen; and if I fail, it shall not be for want of perseverance. But be that as it may," she continued, in a chilling voice, "I shall be no man's wife." These words stabbed her to the heart, even while she uttered them, but pride and every instinct of her womanhood were in arms against this man, and this woman, who so mercilessly intruded upon her most sacred feelings and emotions.

Once more, in memory, she felt his burning lips on hers, looked into his eloquent love-lit eyes, and heard the music of his voice. She sighed profoundly, and a pain, both sweet and bitter, thrilled and unnerved her. Rising, she passed Maud Tremaine hastily, and did not stop until she reached the seclusion of her own room.

"Has it come to this?" she asked herself with grief and shame. "What might have been, alas, can never be! Oh, Harold, my lost love, why have you opened anew these bleeding wounds? Better, almost, to have died, than live to suffer all that agony again." Then, kneeling down, she prayed for strength "to suffer and be still."

Miss Tremaine's wily tongue then poured the

same distressful story of broken vows into Mr. Vivien's ears, with this exception, she made no mention of his daughter's name, and left him in ignorance of a love that Harold St. George had so boldly avowed.

Mr. Vivien was deeply pained by conduct so unworthy of his friend, but a vague something forbade him to condemn unheard one he had loved so long.

"You need not speak to him of this until I bid you," Miss Tremaine said, as she passed from the room, triumphing in the thought that she had driven a poisoned arrow to each of these trusting hearts.

"Now, Harold St. George," she said to herself, "if smiles and tears cannot win you back to me, my deadliest hate shall keep you far from her."

With her subtle instincts and all her knowledge of the human heart, she yet undervalued and did not comprehend that fine nobility, exquisite tenderness, and loyal, unquestioning faith in one beloved, that had well-nigh rendered impervious to her aim both Chester Vivien and his daughter.

The man, with all his simplicity and childlike sincerity, was of necessity somewhat tainted by the skepticism of the world he had lived in, and was scarcely prepared to believe implicitly the statement of this, or any other beautiful woman, without hearing his friend in his own defense.

Clare knew that in much Maud Tremaine had spoken true, and from the depths of her great, loving heart pitied the man who, in his rashness, had sacrificed all hope of happiness. Having been trained austerely, she did not for

a moment think that the bitter cup could pass him by. Honor, duty, integrity, all demanded, she felt, the consummation of his vows. It was indeed a bitter cup, bitter as death to her; she had thought it drained to the very dregs, but in his suffering drank anew. What Maud Tremaine had said she scarcely heeded, for since she had thought of it at all, she had felt and known that she could not grasp the joy which had come so near.

All day long she did not leave her room, but lay prone upon her bed, living over again the agony she had hoped to bury; and when her mother came with tender solicitude and said that she must eat, to please her, Clare barely tasted what she had brought, and said so mournfully:

"Mother, I cannot eat, it only chokes me," that Mrs. Vivien left her almost broken-hearted. To see this child either sad or suffering, had of late, both tortured and unnerved her.

When morning came again, she was rejoiced to see her in her usual seat at the breakfast table, looking better than she had done since that fearful ride.

An hour or two later, Mr. Dartmoth called for Miss Tremaine. He was still mad enough to have the hope of winning his imperious love, even from a rich man's arms.

"You do not love this man," he said, after she had confessed the truth to him, "and yet you are his promised wife."

She caught the ring of eager pain, in the speak-

er's voice, and did not trust herself to answer, but walked to the window and looked out. For a moment she stood idly tapping upon its panes, and then turned and approached Mr. Dartmoth.

"Love him," she said, and with a low sneering laugh, she bent nearer; "know, Percy Dartmoth, that beyond all men, I hate Harold St. George."

"Then in Heaven's name, why would you marry him?" he asked with consternation.

"First, because he is rich, and I ambitious. Second, he has offered me such indignities as no man ever did, and I cannot let them go unpunished. Third, if I do not marry him, he will be happy; I hate him, and that he never shall be. Are these not reasons enough?" she asked, with that cold sneer still upon her lips.

"Do you mean to tell me that Harold St. George no longer loves you?" Mr. Dartmoth asked with intense excitement, and she answered:

"He has dared to tell me, that he not only did not but had never loved me, save with a spurious passion for which he blushed; and more, that he loved another."

"Impossible," Mr. Dartmoth said, with genuine incredulity.

"You may think so, my friend," she replied, looking at him kindly, "but I know to my bitter shame that he spoke the truth. Harold St. George has been through life an ideal fanatic, aiming loftily, yet falling low; and no experience, however, bitter, seems to have won from his perverted faiths, this man who in his blind worship of the beautiful, is

unconsciously the slave of his own passions. Yes, he has spoken the truth, I am less than nothing to him. Maud Tremaine simply clothed for him, the ideal that has been the *ignis-fatuus* of his life."

"Then by all the gods, you shall not marry him," he said, wildly excited; "for I will save you even from yourself. I have not gold to match with his; but I have these strong arms to defend you from such infamy, and this brain to win you a support. Oh! my darling, listen to me while it is not too late; be to me what no other woman can be, my loved and worshiped wife."

With outstretched hands, and pleading words he was bending near her, his face and form inspired and radiant with that deathless passion, which for months, had illumined her benighted way. She knew well what he had been to her and what he was; and nearer than she had ever come to loving any man, she had come to loving him. But that rapture women feel in men's acknowledged love, who in return, love them, with purest passion, and entire abandoment of self, Maud Tremaine did not feel, and was incapable of ever feeling. Beyond all created things she loved herself, and whatever could minister to her pleasure; but to-day, this man's love touched her as it had never done. Looking at him with a tender warmth in her beautiful eyes, she laid her hand softly in his, and said in a sweet low voice:

"Percy Dartmoth, of all those who have loved me, I have felt pity and sorrow, only for you; and more than any other I have loved you." "If this be true, break this miserable engagement at once and be my own, my wife," he said with agitation, and seized both her hands.

Drawing them away from him, she answered sadly:

- "If I had met you long ago, when it was not indeed 'too late,' how different it might have been with me; but now, to marry you, would be impossible."
- "Why impossible?" he asked, "since you do not love the man to whom you are promised."
- "I hate him, it is true," she said, "but I love you, far too much, to drag you into my unhallowed life. If there be one generous instinct in my heart it is this." Then with more fondness than she had ever shown him, she laid her white hand upon his bowed head and left it there, while she continued in the same melodious voice:
- "Were I to marry you, the day might come, and all too soon, when you would loathe and curse me, for having done so."
- "Never! I swear," he said, lifting his head firmly, "be mine, and only death shall part us."
- "Alas! my friend, my one true love, you know not what madness you ask; but I who know so well and fear so much, must save you from it," she answered, in the sweetest and saddest of voices.

For once in her life she was sincere, and if she could have undone that wretched past, might have sacrificed her hopes of grandeur to his love. Tears of genuine grief were dimming her beautiful eyes They half maddened him, and he cried:

"Oh! Maud, darling, do not make this miserable marriage; let him go free."

A change came over the mournful face, all softness and sadness, seemed to leave it; the lips compressed and hardened, and into the eyes came a baleful light, as she answered fiercely:

"Never! for even were ambition dead, my thirst for vengeance can not die, and mark me, I could wreak no surer on this proud man, than to become his wife. But failing in this, armed with every shaft hatred can point, while life lingers, I shall stand between Harold St. George, and the happiness he covets."

"Maud, Maud, you must be mad, no sane woman could ever feel and speak, as you are doing." Then stretching forth his arms to her imploringly, he plead wildly:

"Come to me, darling, let me save you from this horror. This very hour, say but the word, my own, my love, and I will take you far, from even the memory of woe."

He was so grand in his strength, so all protecting in his love and tenderness, that she could not help feeling that she would find both rest and peace, in those fond arms, if only it were not too late. She hesitated, faltered, and in a moment more, his arms were around her, and her proud head, bowed above the heart which beat for her alone. Tenderly he lifted the drooping face, and on those perfect lips that were denied to Harold St. George, pressed love's first kiss; but scarce had felt its ecstacy, when,

drawing herself away from him, she said, in a voice that sounded to him like the wail of a lost spirit:

"Percy Dartmoth, that was our first and last embrace; and in the years to come, when you may hear my name branded with the vilest, remember what I tell you now, that no man's lips but yours, have ever touched mine, and this one kiss shall never leave them, but pure and undefiled go with them to the grave. Farewell, and—it is best—, farewell—forever—."

Before the stunned, unhappy man divined her meaning, she was gone.

Knowing how useless it would be to remain longer—when once more he had regained his shattered self-command, mystified by the strangeness of both her words and manner, broken in spirit and almost hopeless, he returned to Olney.

# CHAPTER XXI.

### LOVE PLEADS WITH LOVE.

"His whole being seemed to cling to her, as though
He divined that, in some unaccountable way,
His happier destinies secretly lay
In the light of her dark eyes. And still in his mind,
To the anguish of losing the woman was joined
The terror of missing his life's destination,
Of which, as in mystical representation,
The love of the woman, whose aspect benign
Guided, starlike, his soul, seemed the symbol and sign.
For he felt, if the light of the star he should miss,
That there lurked in his nature, concealed, an abyss,
Into which all the current of being might roll
Devastating a life, and submerging a soul."
—Owen Meredith.

MR. ST. GEORGE did not long delay making his appearance again at Claremont, and this time walked straight into the library, where, as he had hoped, he found both Clare and Mr. Vivien.

At first there was unusual constraint between them, but this soon wore away, and when Mr. St. George insisted upon Clare's going to the parlor, and singing with him, some of their old favorites, they seemed once more, the old-time friends. After he was silent she sang on with nervous haste, as if fearing or dreading, to be quiet, and alone with him.

She heard him say at last:

"Clare, Clare! I can no longer bear this torture of suspense. Speak to me, darling," he continued in a low, pleading voice.

Wilder and wilder beat her heart, until with one great tearless sob she turned to him and asked in a trembling voice:

- "What would you have me say to you, Mr. St. George?"
- "Bid me live, for love and you," he answered, bending near her, eager passion in both tone and look.
- "Alas! I can not," she replied, in a weary, hopeless tone, and lifting her mournful eyes to his, continued, "If in your heart, you have no feeling of remorse, at least you should have more pity for me, than to subject me to this needless pain."
- "Oh! my love, my love, do not speak to me like that; there is no humiliation, no remorse, that I have not endured, for the sake of that brief madness, which brought me not even the happiness of an hour. I have confessed the truth to Maud Tremaine, and told her that I loved you, darling, as I had loved no other woman."
- "It must have been a bitter thing for you to say, and bitterer for her to hear," she answered, bowing her head upon her hands.

Without replying to what she had said, he continued:

"From the first, I feared that she did not love me, and for months I have known it. Now that she knows there is no love between us, what motive leads her to still desire the fulfillment of our engagement, I have no means of knowing, unless it be one too paltry, pardon me, even to mention in your presence."

· As he said this, his lip curled contemptuously.

Clare looked up at him questioningly. Having an intuition of his thought, she flushed slightly as she asked:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if it is gold she covets, she is welcome to it, even to the half of my estate; and I shall certainly make her the offer, as I have tried all other arguments in vain; and she still boldly affirms, that I must keep my vows. She cannot force me to marry her, and I told her so. In all the world, there is but one woman, who can ever be my wife, and to win her I would give my earthly kingdom, and all that ambition ever cherished."

He stopped and laying his hand tenderly upon the bowed young head, asked softly:

"My love, is there no hope?"

Maud Tremaine she had never loved, and indeed, had had no cause to do so; but none the less, she was her sister, and for her sake, she was filled with burning shame, and when she felt his touch, shuddered as if it were unhallowed. The breaking of these vows, that were to her, little less sacred than the marriage vows themselves, seemed sacrilege in the sight of Heaven; and so well she had been trained in these strict tenets, that while her noble heart, divined the truth and purity of his love for her, pitied, forgave and comprehended an error that was only human, believed in the misery and mockery of such a union, from this labyrinth of woe, she saw no honorable escape for him, and answered sadly:

"There is no hope."

For one moment he sat speechless and motionless. Then seizing her hands, he asked appealingly:

"Clare, little one, have you no longer any love in your heart for me? no pity, no forgiveness, that you can so mercilessly consign me to this misery?"

She did not draw her hands away, but looked at him with ineffable yearning tenderness, as she answered:

"If I could save you from this sorrow, God knows I would, for I do pity you deeply and have nothing to forgive; but I have no power to do so, and you only torture, when you offer me your love."

"You are cruel, my darling, to think and feel like this. If I had wooed her from pure wantonness, and then discarded her from no fault of her own, I would be base indeed; but you know well, this is not true. When I asked her to be my wife, Heaven knows I did desire it; but the woman I wooed and seemed to win, was not Maud Tremaine, but a creation of my own mad fancy, shrined in her perfect form; and day by day, as we knew each other better, the scales fell from our eyes, and at last we saw each other as we were, and knew that continents apart we would be happier than together. If she ever loved me, she has long ceased to do so, and now confesses, that she hates me bitterly.

"I, my darling, learned, too late to save me from my folly, that even before I knew her, I loved another, with my heart's best and truest affection; and in those dark hours when we waited and watched, fearing that pure spirit's flight, I suffered the agony of a thousand deaths. Oh! listen to me, dearest! do not turn away, and if you love me, be mine, my own true wife."

As she did not answer, he continued:

"I cannot commit such blasphemy against my manhood, and every instinct of my heart, as I now know this marriage with Maud Tremaine would be. Yet no man could deplore more bitterly than I, our terrible mistake; more even for her sake than my own; but knowing that mistake, I hold it the nobler and wiser part to undo what we have done, before it is too late."

"Is it not already that?" Clare asked in a faltering voice.

"No! a thousand times no," he answered, almost fiercely, moving nearer to her and still holding her hands tightly clasped in his.

"I cannot find it in my heart to censure you," she said, "and in your freedom wish you all the joy man ever finds in life; but I implore you, by the memory of past friendship, to leave me in peace, since I can be nothing to you, followed ever by a sister's wrongs. I have, perhaps, already wronged her in thought, but in this I will not wrong her, for if there be any truth in woman, she loves you. Only yesterday, on her knees, she avowed it; and when she told you that she hated you, it was no doubt in the delirium of passion."

She said no more, but looked up at him through blinding tears.

His face was ashen gray, in the fine eyes there was a look of desolate pain, and deep lines seemed

furrowed around the expressive mouth. As if the blight of years had come to him in these few moments, he sat a bowed and broken man. Hopeless, because he felt that all had been said that could be, and she was still unconvinced. He had learned, too, of Maud Tremaine's treachery, and knew that his unaided strength would be no match for her wily cunning.

"Already that masterpiece of acting," he thought, "has wrought her evil will upon Clare's generous heart."

His features worked convulsively, twice he attempted to speak, but from his drawn lips there came no sound. She saw his agony, felt him shudder, then her hands fell from his nerveless clasp. These moments of awful silence were an eternity of pain to her loving heart.

Mad thoughts were rioting in his brain, deeper and darker grew his despair; and when, involuntarily, Clare reached forth her hands, and looking at him with imploring eyes, said:

"Speak to me, say anything, but do not look like that," in a voice hoarse with misery he did speak, and startled her by such bitterness as she had never heard from him.

"Clare Vivien," he said, "you have never loved me, or else you could not doom me to this woe. What you have felt for me, was only the puny fancy of a dreaming girl, that my own heart and its desires has glorified into a woman's love, and on this frail foundation I have built all my hopes of happiness, only to see them once more miserably wrecked."

He stopped, arrested by the unutterable anguish in the young face that was so dear to him.

"Oh! my God, forgive him. Thou knowest all

his grief," she said.

At once he felt remorse for his mad words, and would have gladly recalled them.

"Forgive me, Clare, I am beside myself with this unlooked-for misery," he said, once more taking in his her cold and trembling hands.

"Oh, my love, my love," he continued, "listen to my pleading, and to the voice of your own heart; think of the long, desolate years that will come to both of us, and have mercy."

Nearer he came to her and wilder plead, nor left a prayer unsaid that love could frame.

She was tortured beyond the power to speak, but through all the torture felt untold bliss, in knowing herself beloved. She saw his tender, imploring eyes, heard his sweet and wooing words, and present and future woe almost forgotten, felt that she was indeed yielding to her heart, and to that pleading voice. Back to the marble face the life-blood rushed, and into the mournful eyes leaped the splendor of a matchless passion.

He felt her hands trembling in his, and seeing those love-lighted eyes, no longer doubted that in both heart and mind she was indeed his own. The rapture of that thrilling glance awakened hope once more.

<sup>&</sup>quot;My life, my all," he murmured, "I felt that you

were less or more than human, to resist such happiness as this," and in the ecstacy of passion drew her to him.

"Since Heaven denies to me this joy," she said at last, in a low unsteady voice, "beloved, it would be sweet to die now—and thus——, oh! sweeter far than to live on, and live without you."

Then shuddering with the memory of woes, that for one blest moment had been forgotten, she drew herself away from his encircling arms, and stood erect, cold, pale, motionless; all color faded from her face, and in her eyes the unutterable pathos of a great despair. So swift and terrible was the change that dazed and wondering, he listened, as she said:

"In my madness, conscience, duty, Heaven itself have been forgotten, and I remembered only, that I loved, and was beloved. Tempt me no more—for I suffer—, oh, God I suffer—!" and tottering she grasped a chair for support.

Her pallid and suffering face terrified Mr. St.

George.

"You are ill, darling," he said, with deep agitation, as he approached her; "let me call some one, or take you to your father."

"I will go to my room," she said, in tones so sad, that he begged remorsefully to be forgiven, for all the misery he had brought her.

She did not answer him in words, but once more through her eyes, there beamed upon him, the luminous light of a deathless love. For one moment only, she stood transfigured to sublimest beauty, then passed out into the hall, and slowly ascended the stairway. He watched and listened until he knew that she had reached her room in safety, and dropping into the nearest chair, battled in vain, with his contending passions and emotions. Overcome at last, he groaned aloud:

"My punishment is greater than I can bear."

For one long dark hour, he scarcely moved; and when he regained his wonted calm, with pallid face, and swollen eyes, went to Chester Vivien and confessed the mournful truth; concealing nothing from him, and in no wise seeking to palliate his own mad folly.

In his friend's noble, kindly heart, he found pity for his suffering, charity for his misguided passions, and forgiveness for the evil he had brought to one, dearer than life to both.

"It is all so sudden and unexpected, that I can give you no advice to-day," Mr. Vivien said, when there had been a moment's pause.

"How little I dreamed of this, Harold," he continued sadly, laying his hand upon his friend's bowed head; "but it is all clear to me now; my daughter's grief and broken heart. She was such a child, such a child," he repeated, "who would have thought to find a woman's heart." Feeling deep sorrow, for the suffering he knew was genuine, he then said:

"Look up Harold, my friend, do not despair, for into this darkness light may come; God knows best and fits our burdens to us. I feel that my child's pure instincts, will guide her to her duty. Let us make that duty no harder to perform."

Mr. St. George made no answer for some moments. He felt so entirely hopeless, that he could take no comfort even from this loyal friend, whose delicate position, as father and stepfather, he fully comprehended. Turning to him at last, he said:

"If Miss Tremaine has not told her, your wife knows nothing of this, Chester, and it is needless that she should, until concealment is no longer possible. I shall see Miss Tremaine again; it may be that grown calmer, she will be more inclined to listen with reason; but I confess, I have little hope. To-day I am unfit to see her, but to-morrow I will come. Go to our darling, Chester, tell her that you know all, let her suffer no longer in silence. Good-by, may Heaven bless you for your kind words, and kinder heart."

Tears dimmed Chester Vivien's eyes, as he saw him go, so utterly forlorn himself, yet remembering with such fond solicitude, another's woe. As he had bidden him, he went at once to his suffering child. Opening the door he entered softly, and found her upon the floor, sobbing in wildest agony. At first, she did not hear him, and did not heed him, even when he spoke, but lifting her gently in his arms, he laid her upon the bed, soothed her with every art affection knows; and with tender delicacy revealed at last that Harold St. George, had told him all. When he left, her heart was less burdened than it had been for months. The feeling that there was no longer any need for concealment from one

to whom she had been always dearer than life itself, was such intense relief, to her naturally frank, ingenuous mind, that she was abler to bear her burden; and indeed was comforted, as her father had little hope of comforting her.

# CHAPTER XXII.

#### THE LAST RESORT.

"While thus from wav'ring thought to thought he flies,
Revolves, and re-revolves, the eager maid
Fixed on his downcast face her pleading eyes,
And its least workings breathlessly surveyed;
And when his answer longer was delayed
Than she had hoped, she trembled, drooped and sighed;
Her quivering lips the heart's alarm betrayed."

— Tasso.

AUD TREMAINE knew of Mr. St. George's last visit, and suspected much of what had really occurred. For, little capable of self-sacrifice as she was herself, she did not for a moment doubt Clare's answer to her lover. Having not yet lost faith in her own omnipotent beauty, she hoped that Mr. St. George, would ask for her before leaving; that she might make one last effort to regain her lost position. In her anger, vengeance seemed quite enough; but when again her own true self, she listened to ambition's voice; in fancy saw the almost royal home which had been prepared for her, and felt that it would be wildest folly to give it up, without one struggle more.

"To be mistress of Olney Heights, its master must be mine," she thought, and in her vehemence called aloud:

"Oh, Fate! help me to win him back, with pity, love or fear; it matters not which, so I but win him."

As well as she knew that this marriage which she urged, would be a crime against all moral law, she knew that human law would ably protect and defend her, were she to appeal to it, for justice or retribution.

But she was too proud to do anything like that, even for the gold she coveted. Conscience, honor, truth and all that makes life worth the living, already she had sacrificed at its unholy shrine; but the world's esteem, and good opinion was a price she could not pay.

"If I could only see him," she thought, "now that he knows there is no hope with Clare, I believe that I could mold him to my will."

Having no capacity to comprehend the real strength of soul, and genuine nobility of this man, who had been tempted by her beauty, led on, and well nigh destroyed; she undervalued him, and deceived herself, with hopes that were the offspring of a vanity, she would have herself despised, as the weakness of a silly woman. But she rested secure in the belief, that nature had placed her beyond the possibility of such a weakness. Beside this, in her long career, she had met so little opposition, from either men or women, that she had no line of strategy marked out, for this open and bold rebellion, that was altogether new to her. Long before, she had discovered this man's weakness, and her experience had taught her, no matter how falsely. that these very weaknesses oftenest governed men's lives. What wonder then, that with her still unshaken faith in her own powers, even this thing which she wished, should seem possible.

Strong in her beliefs, she wrote him a dainty little note, asking him to come on the morrow, and signed it, "yours in deep distress."

Mr. St. George came as she desired, and as he had himself intended. Never had he seen her more beautiful; she was all grace and softness; a little melancholy in her drooping eyes and quivering on her lips.

He listened unmoved to all her pleading, saw every art she employed to win, and comprehended her aims and motives. He had not expected anything like this, but manifested no surprise, and heard her in silence. Even when with clasped hands and tender imploring eyes, she looked up at him and asked if he had no word of comfort for her, he still hesitated. What could he say to her, how reveal all that was in his mind. He could not forget that she was a woman, and one too, that he had once hoped to make his wife, and he shuddered and recoiled at thought of the degrading proposal he had come to make.

She was watching him intently, and saw his hesitation, but ascribed it to feelings widely differing from the true ones. She came nearer to him, sighed profoundly, and laid her soft white hand on his, caressingly. Once, that touch would have thrilled to his inmost being; but now he shuddered and an icy pain shot to his heart. Only a moment more he hesitated; for believing it to be his last hope of a peaceable solution to this wretched en-

tanglement, he plunged boldly into the unpleasant subject, and offered to have his estate valued and divided, giving her one-half, to be hers through life, and at her death, to be conveyed to whom she pleased. He talked rapidly, excitedly, and did not watch her face; therefore, was not prepared for the storm of rage and fury, that burst upon him, as he finished.

She wrung her hands, she wept, she walked the floor, and called on Heaven to witness her deep humiliation.

He cowered before her justly offended pride, and begged for her forgiveness.

"On this side of the grave I never will forgive you, Harold St. George," she said with bitter emphasis; "If you can, free yourself from your marriage vows, but with my consent, you never will be free. I have borne enough already, but this is the crowning infamy of all. Are you so mad as to believe, that for the paltry things you offer me, I could let my vengeance pass, and send you forth, the happy lover of a rival whom I hate? I cannot force you to marry me, you have said it, but I can, and will prevent your marrying her."

In vain he urged her to hear him, in vain he told her, that the world should think she had discarded him, and that it should never know the price he paid for freedom; she was too much enraged to listen.

"The preparations for our marriage shall go on," she almost hissed, "and on our wedding day, you can be a truant bridegroom if you choose."

Then she laughed sardonically, and told him that she thought their interview might as well end, as she saw no good could come from prolonging it. He rose at once, bowed haughtily, and left her, full as much outraged, as she was herself.

"What manner of woman can she be," he thought. "If she ever had a soul, surely she must have bartered it to the arch fiend, in exchange for those evil, but surpassing charms, that seem to cast some blight on all who look upon them."

From Miss Tremaine, Mr. St. George went to Chester Vivien, told him all that had occurred, and that he had no longer any hope of mercy from Maud Tremaine; but implored him to intercede for him with Clare.

"Do not ask me to do that, Harold," Mr. Vivien answered, "for I can but feel that my child is right. I do not censure your determination, for feeling as you do, and as you believe my step-daughter to feel, it would be madness for you to marry her. Of course your position is an embarrasing one, as you do not like to take the initiative, and say to the world, my engagement is at end, and she will not. Hence I see no way to cut the Gordian knot, but for you to go away; and before going, arrange your affairs, that you may leave them for an indefinite time. It hurts me, my friend, to give you this advice, but I have looked at the matter from every point of view, and can see no other wise course open to you, if Maud still foolishly persists in concealing your broken engagement. Were you to go, I believe her pride would compel her to make some

explanation that would not be disparaging to you, or to herself."

"If she were to do so, could it have any weight with Clare?" Mr. St. George asked, looking up eagerly.

"Alas! I fear not," Mr. Vivien answered, shaking his head sadly, "for if Maud be the woman I am led to believe her, from all that you have told me; failing to have ambition gratified, she will let nothing pass, that can accomplish her revenge. Already she has told her ingenious story to her sister, and told it with such consummate art, that few could doubt its truth. While I know that Clare pities you profoundly, and loves you tenderly, I also know that she pities, as you and I could never pity, the woman who has lost your love."

Mr. St. George groaned audibly, but in his hopelessness made no answer, feeling that his friend's fears were only too well founded. Soon after he rose to go, and said gravely, as he took Mr. Vivien's hand:

"I will think of what you have said to me, Chester, and when I have decided on my future course, will let you know that decision at once; until then—farewell."

Without more words, they parted, and Harold St. George bore home a dreary hopeless heart. He could not think with calmness of an exile, that seemed little less to him, than with his own hands shutting himself out of his earthly paradise, and two weeks passed, each day freighted with despair and

doubt, before he decided to do as Mr. Vivien had advised.

In little more than a week, the wedding day would arrive; and Miss Tremaine had seen fit to let all preparations go on undisturbed.

Mrs. Vivien was astonished at Mr. St. George's prolonged absence, but not dreaming of the real truth, was compelled to accept her daughter's careless and evasive answer, when she asked its meaning; that as he was very much engaged, and knowing she would be also, she had told him she would excuse him until the appointed time. Then she laughed that insolent provoking laugh, which alarmed her mother always, and now doubly so, when the poor woman was half distracted, with her doubts and fears.

In these sad days, Clare seldom left her father's side. Within the walls of Claremont, she felt stifled, and out of doors as much as possible they passed their time: finding in the glory of advancing autumn, some little relief from the ominous chill that seemed clinging to their hearthstone.

She knew from her father of Mr. St. George's determination to go away, and while she suffered deeply, approved of his intention. Her strange, unnatural position, and a vague terror of the future, were fast destroying her newly-regained health and strength. At every unexpected sound she would start and tremble, dreading, yet knowing not what she dreaded, for the very air seemed burdened with the sighs of suffering hearts.

Effort after effort Percy Dartmoth made to see

Miss Tremaine, but they were all in vain; and day after day he grew more madly desperate, writing to her wild, miserable appeals, begging her to fly with him, far from the possibility of her vengeance and the unholy crime she would commit; but no answer reached him, and he, too, watched and waited, fearing the worst evil that he believed could come to him, yet still defying fate, and through all his despair there was some gleam of hope.

# CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE UNEXPECTED GUEST.

"And if we do but watch the hour,
There never yet was human power,
Which could evade, if unforgiven,
The patient search, and vigil long,
Of him who treasures up a wrong."

-Byron.

WHEN Mr. St. George had once made up his mind that it was best and right that he should leave, he went rapidly at his preparations for departure. It was a most bitter thing for him to do, and he felt it in every throb of his tortured heart, to leave once more home, love, and almost everything that made life dear.

He had only a moment before returned from a farewell inspection of his estate, and sat, his head resting dejectedly on one gloved hand, deep in sombre thought, when his servant handed him a card, which its owner followed.

"Sydney Alton," Mr. St. George read, and, looking up, his own met a pair of dark, and at this moment by no means pleasant, eyes.

"Mr. St. George, I presume," the stranger said, bowing.

"Yes," that gentleman answered; "but I believe I have not the honor of your acquaintance, sir."

Pointing to his card he said:

"My name is Alton."

- "I perceived that it was," Mr. St. George answered, and looking questioningly at him, pushed a chair toward him, and asked him to be seated.
- "Being a stranger, you would, no doubt, like to know to what circumstance you are indebted for this visit," Mr. Alton said, and his listener fancied neither tone nor words.
- "I have heard, sir," he continued, "that you were about to marry a lady calling herself Maud Tremaine. Is it true? he asked, almost fiercely, and as fiercely Mr. St. George asked:

"By whose authority do you question me, sir?"
His strange guest bent towards him with flashing
eyes, and passion-distorted face, and through his
clenched teeth hissed:

"By the authority of the lady's husband." Mr. St. George started visibly, and said:

"You are mad; Miss Tremaine has no husband."

The dark face he was watching flushed hotly, and into the eyes flashed demoniac fires; but a fiendish laugh was his only answer, and there was silence for a moment. Mr. St. George was fearfully angry, and the intruder saw it.

"Your base insinuation is a monstrous lie," he said, "and you are its vile inventor."

He did not remember, in his generous defense of a woman, that this one was his bitterest foe; and even if he had, was far too knightly in his instincts, to let such calumny pass unnoted.

A wrathful silence followed these words. The stranger looked at him, with fierce, dilating eyes,

and said at last, in a voice that was firm, but hoarse with passion:

"What I have said is true as Heaven. For six long years Maud Alton, not Tremaine, has been my wedded wife."

"Impossible!" Mr. St. George answered, staggered by the man's tragic earnestness, but by no means believing him.

"This is one of her lovers that she has lured on with her sorceries, and betrayed, at last, to madness," he thought, and felt a throb of pity for her victim.

"You are a madman, I see that plainly, and I do not care to listen to your ravings," he said, more calmly than he had spoken yet; and rising, as if to go, stood waiting for the unwelcome guest to go also.

But Mr. Alton did not leave his seat, and instead, said earnestly and with far less anger:

"If you will sit down, Mr. St. George, and listen to me, I will convince you not only that I am sane, but that I speak the solemn truth. Until I do convince you, I shall not leave you."

Mr. St. George did not doubt that he was mad, but thinking that it might be wiser to indulge him, sat down, and Mr. Alton began his story:

"It has been seven years," he said, "since I first met Maud Tremaine. She was a girl of sixteen, and unless she has changed greatly, how beautiful you must know. I was the only child of an only parent, the idol of a father's heart; and so far as he knew, no wish of mine was left ungratified. Alas! I fear I repaid him ill, 'Heaven rest his soul!' From

the first hour I saw Maud Tremaine, I loved her madly, and at last, won I now know, by the glitter of gold she never grasped, she promised to be my wife.

"My father bitterly opposed our union, and her aunt hated me for follies, that might have been forgiven to my youth, and denied me entrance to her house.

"Maud attended school, and I saw her daily, either as she would go or return. I urged my suit with frantic desperation, and painted in glowing colors, the life of opulent luxury we would lead, until aided, no doubt, by my father's opposition and the glory of triumphing over him, she consented to marry me; but urged that neither her aunt, nor my father, should know anything of our intentions until we were already married. I knew myself, how earnestly they opposed our marriage, and believing, that they would do all in their power to prevent it, gladly acquiesced in her suggestion, and procuring a license, met her one day as she returned from school. A carriage was waiting near, we entered it, and soon reached Jersey City and the church we had selected, where in the presence of two friends of my own, we were married. Returning at once to New York, she was delayed so short a time, that her aunt, who was herself out, finding her at home on her return, never suspected that she had been delayed at all.

"Maud was to confess to her aunt what she had done, that night or the following morning, and I was to tell my father, never doubting his generous in-

dulgence, even though for the first time he had opposed my wish."

The speaker's breath seemed labored, for a moment he paused, as if overcome, by the rush of emotions, that he had been crowding back.

At last in a broken voice, he continued:

- "That night, she had no opportunity to tell her aunt, as company engaged her until it was too late, and the next morning, all New York was startled, by a terrible failure, dark rumors of defalcation and a sudden death.
- "When I reached home, I went straight to my father's room, and found him walking the floor, in such deep agitation, that I surmised at once, that he had heard of my marriage, or suspected it; but when, feeling deep remorse, I asked him what was troubling him, and he answered:
- "'Nothing that you can help, my poor boy,' I knew that I was mistaken.
- "To know that he was already greatly troubled, increased my reluctance, to tell him that which I knew would be an added pain; but feeling it to be a necessity, I plunged at once into my confession, urging every plausible pretext in extenuation of our conduct. He heard me in silence to the end, and then a deep, heartfelt groan, was his only answer. For the first time in my life, I felt truly and deeply remorseful, for having grieved him, and begged humbly for his forgiveness.
- "'Alas! my dear son,' he said at last, in a voice husky with emotion, 'you need my pity, far more than my forgiveness, for I fear that this rash act, will

cost you years of misery. God grant that my fears may prove unfounded, and that I may have been unjust, to this girl whom you have made your wife. All too soon her truth and constancy will be put to the severest test; for Sydney, you and I are beggars, ay! worse than beggars. To retrieve my failing fortunes I have used money, not my own, never once dreaming that I would not be able to repay it; but overwhelming disaster after disaster, have seemed to pursue me, and to-night I am a ruined, disgraced, and broken-hearted man.'

"His breathing seemed labored and difficult, and as he ceased to speak, his head fell forward, and rested upon the table on which he leaned. I saw a quick shudder pass over him, heard a low groan, and stepping to his side laid my hand upon his head, and asked if he was not ill; but he neither moved nor spoke. I felt his cold hands and looked into his sightless eyes, then called aloud for help. Soon the entire household were around him. I sent for a physician, but in the meantime we used every remedy known to us, to resuscitate him. Alas! it was all in vain, my father was dead; truly of a broken heart.

"That my grief was deep and poignant, I need not tell you, for he was my first and last earthly friend, I having known no mother. When I had laid him tenderly beside my long-dead mother, once more my thoughts turned to the young wife I had not seen since my deep grief, and I had not even received a line of sympathy from her. I supposed, of course, that she had told her aunt, and I could

form no idea of the treatment she had received. I went to the house and asked for her, not knowing that she would be there. The servant informed me that Miss Tremaine was at school. That looked to me very much as if she and her aunt were still friends. I was so impatient to see her, that for hours I walked up and down the streets on which I had met her so often.

At last I saw her coming towards me. I knew she had seen me, for she faltered and almost stopped, then came slowly on and met me. She was very pale, and there was a strange glitter in her beautiful eyes. She did not speak, and I took her hand and asked:

- "Have you no word of love or pity for me, darling?"
- "'I have far too much pity for myself,' she answered, 'to be able to feel any for you, Sydney Alton. From first to last you have deceived me, basely misrepresented yourself, and painted in glowing colors a life—you knew, beggar that you are—you could never give me. Do not talk to me of love or pity.'
- "As she said this, for all trace of softness, she might have been one of the furies.
- "I was appalled; my father's words came back to me with overwhelming power.
- "'You wrong me, Maud,' I said, 'for I never even dreamed of my father's disastrous failure, when I made you my wife. Heaven knows that, madly as I love you, I would not have dragged you down to such poverty as mine.'

- "'Neither shall you,' she answered me, with cold disdain.
- "'What will you do?' I asked, both angered and amazed.
- "'No one knows of our marriage,' she said, 'except the minister and the two friends who witnessed it. I have been to them, and they have promised never to betray us. I gave them good reasons for asking their silence.'
- "'What were those reasons, pray?' I asked, feeling deeply outraged, and, doubtless, showing it in both voice and manner.
- "'I told them,' she answered, in a less frigid tone, 'that because of your changed condition, we thought it would be best for me to remain with my aunt, at least for the present; and to do this, it would be necessary to conceal our marriage from her, as, knowing of it, she would do nothing more for me, and being her nearest relative and destined heiress, we believed it would be unwise to act differently.' She paused, as if waiting for my reply.

"I do not remember all that I said to her, for I was a madman then. I loved her, and I felt that I was nothing to her. She had taken our fates in her own hands, and without one word to me had disposed of both; and every instinct of my heart, warned me of what has truly come to pass. She listened to me for some moments, in cold and unmoved silence, then said, haughtily: 'When you can act and speak as a gentleman should, I will listen to you, but not until then,' and, turning, she walked rapidly away from me.

'So young, so heartless,' I almost shrieked, and for some paces followed her; but feeling that I was in truth not master of myself, I stopped, and blind with unutterable pain, staggered rather than walked to my desolate home, and for two weary, miserable days did not leave my room. Then I wrote to my wife, to meet me at the same place as she returned from school.

"We met, and as I had foreseen, I yielded to her wishes. We were quite calm; I with the hopelessness of despair, and she with what—Heaven only knows. We decided then and there, that I should go away, West, abroad, or anywhere, so that I left New York. I was to win the fickle goddess Fortune, and then, and not until then, return and claim my wife. That was the substance of what we said, and then, almost as strangers might have done, we parted.

"Soon after, a forlorn and wretched exile, I left New York. In the far West, for three long years, I battled bravely with adversity, and my evil fortunes. Of my wife, I heard occasionally, sometimes from herself, and sometimes indirectly through others; I learned that she had left school, and entered the gay world, where her brilliant beauty was the theme of every tongue. Half-mad with jealousy, I listened to marvelous stories of her triumphs, and resolved to return at once, and claim her as my wife. One of the friends who had witnessed our marriage, was also in the West, and the other had been long dead. Hence there was no one in New York, who dreamed that she was other than

she seemed. I knew that she did not love me, and felt, that she was incapable of love; but none the less I loved her, and longed for the joy of beholding her. My mind once made up, was soon put in execution, and little more than three years after I parted from her, to my wife's intense disgust, one morning I stood suddenly before her, announced by a name assumed for the occasion.

"I found her all that report had said of her; more beautiful than I had dreamed, even she could become. In vain I pleaded for my rights, she was more obdurate than she had been before; and as I was no better able to support her, she had in truth, some justice on her side; but I believed, and told her, that her presence would nerve my arm and brain, to wrench from fortune, all that we desired.

"She would not listen to me, and called me a madman, even to propose such a thing. Indeed I felt little better than one, being so utterly unable to enforce my claims.

"For one long month, I watched her vain, triumphant career, then deeply humiliated and unmanned, in my powerlessness once more left, but that time told her, that when I came again, whether empty or full handed, it would be to remain and assert my rights.

"Three years have passed since that promise was made, and I am here to keep it. In my first absence I wrote to her occasionally, under an assumed name. In these last years, she has heard no word from me; but I did not dream that she would dare to think of marriage, and when I heard of the

possibility of such a thing, it was a blow as painful as unexpected.

"'She may think me dead,' I thought, with some remorse for my long silence, and at once I wrote her a note of warning, only a few lines, saying: 'A sword suspended by a hair hangs over you, beware of any false step.' I signed no name, and mailed it to an acquaintance in New York, asking him to remail it there. If she had any conscience left, I knew these lines would awaken it at once, and deter her from the rash and guilty act she contemplated. Having warned her, I wished to prove her to the utmost, and resolved to wait with patience for the end.

"I have waited and watched; and am here today, to save a man, better than myself perhaps, from a doom even more infamous than my own."

As he spoke these last words he rose to his feet, both face and form ennobled by the dignity of a fixed and firm resolve.

He looked down questioningly, at Mr. St. George, who had listened to his entire, wonderful story in complete silence. At first with incredulity; but the conviction came to him, slowly but surely, that he was listening to the plain unvarnished truth, and that whatever weakness, or unworthiness, there might be in the man, he was now at least, terribly in earnest and incapable of falsehood. The revelation had been so unexpected, and so horrible, to every sense of honor, truth or virtue, that he had not once thought of his own release, from his tor-

mentress; but, as those dark eager eyes, looked into his, and asked as plainly as eyes could ask:

"What will you do?" his heart throbbed wildly for one moment with the exultation of its freedom; but he answered the inquiring look with a calmness that was forced.

"Be seated, sir," he said, "and I will be as frank with you, as I believe you have been with me. In the beginning I will say, that even though you had not come, Miss Tremaine would never have been my wife, and I have told her so; but she persistently refuses to release me from my engagement, not I believe, with any hope of compelling me to marry her, but that she may punish me through the loss of one, dearer than life. If your story be true, I am forever free from her evil scheming; but to be quite sure that my own desire has not lent credulity to my mind, I must see you and Miss Tremaine face to face."

"It has been my intention from the first," Mr. Alton answered, "to go to her as soon as I had told you my story; and I desire you to witness our meeting. You will need no other proof that I have spoken the truth."

He was naturally intensely excited, and far more anxious for the meeting with Miss Tremaine, than Mr. St. George, who could not help feeling reluctance to witness the shame even of this heartless woman; but when he rose impatiently and proposed going, without a word the latter accompanied him.

# CHAPTER XXIV.

# WITHIN FATE'S IRON GRASP.

"Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all."

-Longfellow, from Friedrich von Logan.

Mr. St. George and Mr. Alton were announced; and having come to plead once more for love and life, Mr. Dartmoth was both pained and disappointed when they entered.

She was herself greatly surprised to see Mr. St. George, as she had not been troubled by visits from him of late. But in no wise disconcerted, she rose and extended her hand to him; then turned gracefully to the stranger, and Mr. St. George presented Mr. Alton.

They stood looking at each other in silence. She did not scream or faint, or do any of those things that are so common to a woman's weakness; but the smile died out of her eyes, and off her lips; and the blood slowly receded from her face, leaving it white and cold as marble.

"So—you have come back;" she said at last, in a low, hard voice.

"Yes! I have kept my promise," he answered firmly.

"And had better be at the bottom of the sea, than to have kept it," she replied with cold, unmeasured scorn.

"For your sake, no doubt," he answered, calmly still, and looking with undaunted eyes, straight into her lurid, flashing orbs.

"What is your purpose? Why not at once reveal it? Tell these gentlemen," she continued, "who you are, and what you have come to do. One of them at least is in utter ignorance." And she laughed, mockingly, unmusically.

Percy Dartmoth had risen to his feet, and as he listened the pallor of death overspread his face, and great drops of perspiration gathered upon his brow. He knew that some agony was fast approaching him; but just how terrible, he did not dream.

There was a moment of awful silence, before Mr. Alton spoke.

"This lady," he said, "whom both of you have known as Miss Tremaine, has been for six long years, my lawfully wedded wife, and to-day I have come to claim her as such."

"Liar! base, miserable liar!" Percy Dartmoth cried, wild with passion, and rushed with frantic rage at the bold speaker; but Mr. St. George grasping his arm, held him back and said to him in a firm voice:

"Dartmoth you are mad, or else have forgotten where you are."

"Unloose me," he answered fiercely, "that I

may kill him, before he repeats this vile and infamous slander."

"Percy Dartmoth, most generous friend, listen to me."

It was Maud Tremaine's voice that called him, and it was musical and sweet, as in those unforgotten hours, when he first loved her.

Slowly his clenched hands relaxed, and as Mr. St. George released him he turned to her and said, with the old softness both of tone and manner:

"I am listening."

"This man," she began scornfully, "has told you the truth, but not the whole truth. For six years I have been his wife, by the hollow mockery of a ceremony, men call marriage, but by more than that, I have not been, before high Heaven I swear. Basely deceived into marrying him, when I learned of his deception, I loathed him and resolved never to be in truth his wife. I told him, that as he had wooed me, with the royal promises of a prince and was in truth a beggar, if he would win me to his side, he must win fortune too.

"He left me and in three years returned as empty-handed as he went, and dared ask me to share his wretched beggary. I answered him, that only a madman could ask a thing like that; as he knew as well as I, that our marriage once acknowledged, my aunt would give me up forever. He knew that I was her destined heiress; knew too, that I did not love him, and yet he asked this sacrifice of me; pleading that my presence would nerve his arm to victory. At last, when every argument had failed to

move me from my settled purpose, some ray of reason must have come to him; for he once more left me in peace, and this time went beyond the sea. His last words to me were:

"'Let fortune smile or frown, when next I come, it will be to claim you as my wife, and you will find escape impossible."

She paused, as if to collect her thoughts and looked intently at each of her listeners.

There was a wild hunted look in Percy Dartmoth's eyes, and every feature seemed quivering with anguish.

Mr. St. George had heard the same story, only told in a slightly different manner, and he was but little moved, from his ordinary calm.

Mr. Alton's face would have been as impenetrable as a mask, but for the dark eyes, that now and then, flashed ominously.

As no one interrupted her, she continued:

"Time passed, I did not hear from him, he did not come, and I began to feel that death had freed me from his persecution. In my own way I had passed my life, imbibing from it all the pleasure that I could; but although often wooed, I never thought of marriage, until less than two years ago, when I first met Harold St. George;" and she bent mockingly, before the person she had named.

"It was his evil fate," she said, "to goad me to it then, by angering and defying me, as no man had ever done. I vowed to be revenged, and as I did not and could never love him, I knew full well that I could take no surer vengeance, than to make him

love me. His good angel saved him for a time; but he was mine, at last, and to be mistress of Olney Heights, ambition prompted me to barter conscience and every hope of love. I own the fear came to me often, that Sydney Alton lived," and she looked at him as scornfully as if he, and not she, was the culprit.

"If I could have done so, I would have kept our engagement secret, until our marriage day; but against my will it became public, and not long after, an anonymous note came to me, bidding me beware of any false step. I knew then, that my fears had been but too well founded, and for a time I hesitated; but at last, come what would, I resolved to defy my fate; and found comfort in the thought, that once his wife, no shame could come to me, unshared by this proud man.

"As the weeks flew on, and I knew that he no longer loved me, and had never loved me worthily; my desire to drag him down from his lofty heights, became greater even than to be mistress of his stately home, and for so sure a vengeance, felt that the world's esteem would be well lost. Unmoved I saw him writhe in the chains that bound him, and vainly strive to break them.

"'You cannot force me, to make you my wife,' he said; but I knew his heart, knew that he loved Clare Vivien, and that his freedom unless freely given, could never win him the joy he coveted. Beside my foiled ambition, he had wronged and basely insulted me; I had lost all other means of punishing him, and think you in my thirst for ven-

geance I could let this last chance pass? No! Percy Dartmoth, not even your love, the one sweet memory of my life, could woo me from my purpose. Almost, I had ceased to fear this wretched man, and truly thought that he would not molest me, unless I really married; and even then, believed that gold would buy his silence. As you see, I have misjudged him.

"But even the chance of this disgrace and wretchedness, I could not bring on you, and felt that my life belonged to vengeance, and not love."

As she ceased to speak, for one moment Mr. Alton's face was a study; icy contempt upon his lips, and scornful indignation in his eyes; but it was only for a moment; then coldly impassive as before, he stood watching.

Percy Dartmoth had fallen back into the nearest chair, and was sitting with bowed head, and folded hands, completely crushed by this unlooked for shame and misery. He did not look up, even when his name was spoken; and she came nearer to him as she said more gently, more appealingly:

"If we had met in time, my life and yours would have been different; but it was too late—. Already the 'trail of the serpent,' had crossed my life, and I could not darken yours with its evil shadow."

She looked at him pleadingly as she finished. In this hour of supremest shame, the loss of this man's love, that had ever been so true and tender, seemed greater to her than the vengeance, to which she would have so remorselessly sacrificed it; and she

almost believed what she had said, "that it might have been different, had they met in time."

But the desperate, despairing man, to whom she now looked appealingly, had no longer even the ghost of such an illusion. At last he saw her as she was, with all the hideous deformity of mind and heart, that had marred her own life and others that were nobler far. He had loved her so madly, worshiped her so blindly; and now he knew that she was incapable of loving, and utterly unworthy of the all absorbing passion, that had sacrificed at her altar, whatever had come between him and his love. He had nothing more to either hope or fear; for having made her his idol, he had bowed all his manhood before her, and found too late, that she was worthless clay.

He had forgiven much in the past, believing that her frailties were only such as time and love could remove, and oh! Heaven, he remembered with bitter agony, how easy it had been to forgive all things, when in the glamor of that enchanting face.

Now, self convicted, she stood before him, heart-less, cold and mercenary, utterly unworthy of the name of woman; and without even that passion, which is a woman's strength and weakness, to excuse the crime she had committed and would still commit. Errors, born of woman's softness, he might have pitied and forgiven; but her sins had nothing womanly in them.

She was still standing before him, with that mute appeal in her lovely eyes, and both Mr. St. George and Mr. Alton, were looking on in silence,

when Percy Dartmoth groaned deeply, and looked up at her with staring eyes, his face drawn and haggard. He gazed long, as if it were the last time he should ever look upon her marvelous loveliness.

"And this is the woman I have loved to my own utter ruin," he said, in a mournful voice, and lifting his eyes to Heaven, murmured:

"Oh, God, forgive me, that I have worshiped

Thy creature, and forgotten Thee."

The white handkerchief which he grasped tightly in his hand, and had pressed to his lips again and again, Maud Tremaine saw, with horror, was stained with his life's blood.

Slowly and with apparent difficulty he rose to his feet.

"Farewell, Maud Tremaine. May God be more merciful to you, than you have been to others; but remember always, that which you have done to me, I forgive. Farewell, forever." Then, unmindful of any other presence, he staggered from the room.

Imploringly she stretched forth her arms to him, but no sound came from her bloodless lips; and when her eyes could no longer follow him, she sank into the chair that he had left, seeming for the first time overcome by the degradation she had brought upon herself. Both men had been shocked by the tragedy of passion they had witnessed. Mr. St. George more deeply than the other, because he knew from what noble heights the victim had fallen, and how really terrible was the wreck. Deeply agitated, he seated himself, and waited for the other man to speak.

In Sydney Alton's breast the fires of passion and emotion, that had once burned so fiercely, seemed to have at last consumed themselves, and left him cold and dead to every thought or feeling, but this one thirst for justice from the woman who had so long wronged and tortured him.

He stood watching her silently for some moments, then approaching her, he said in a cold voice.

"Calm yourself, madam, for I wish you to decide this morning upon the course I shall pursue. I do not feel that any consideration is due you, but for the sake of those who have never wronged me, I will grant you this much grace."

She did not answer him, and he continued:

"If you prefer that the world should not know the crime you meditated, our marriage shall be kept secret, and I will claim you publicly in a second marriage."

At this she lifted her white face defiantly, and asked:

"Why this double mockery? I have been as much your wife as I will ever be."

"Have a care how you tempt me to do my worst," he answered; and one glance into the fixed and resolute face, convinced her that rebellion would be useless.

Fate had at last arrested her, and out of its iron and relentless grasp, she saw no way of escape. She had felt that to accomplish her revenge she could relinquish the good opinion of the world she loved; but now, when it was the one desperate alternative to this wretched marriage, she shrank from it with horror; and remembering in this hour of agony, the mother who had loved her through good and ill, she no longer hesitated. On the one side lay dishonor and disgrace, on the other only new links and firmer rivets to the loathsome chain already forged.

With folded arms and tightly compressed lips, Mr. Alton awaited what she would say.

Mr. St. George's position was painfully embarrassing, and while he felt that he could have no voice in their decision, was naturally deeply interested in what it would be.

Miss Tremaine did not long hesitate, and when she lifted her face proudly to the stern man, who was so mercilessly ordering her fate, in her mind she had decided; but she asked in a cold, measured voice:

- "Is there no reprieve from dishonor, but marriage with you?"
- "None," he answered, more coldly even than she had asked.
- "Then, for the sake of one who has loved me always, let it be marriage," she said, in a firm, hard voice, and rose to her feet.

Cold and imperturbable still, he motioned her to be seated once more.

"I wish to know before leaving," he said, "at what hour to-morrow our marriage shall take place?"

"As soon as you like, for time cannot make my wretched doom more welcome," she answered, fiercely.

Apparently unruffled, by either her words or manner, he said firmly and icily:

"Ten, to-morrow morning, then, is the hour I select. In the meantime, you can tell your mother whatever you choose, and I feel assured she will receive anything better than the real truth."

With this parting stab, he turned to Mr. St. George and asked:

"Have you anything to say to this lady?"

As Mr. St. George, who was taken by surprise, did not answer at once, he added:

"It may be your last opportunity."

"I have nothing to say to Miss Tremaine," Mr. St. George replied; "fate has given the freedom she denied me, and for the rest, I trust to Heaven and love."

She had once more risen, and stood looking scornfully from one man to the other.

"Yes! Harold St. George, you have escaped my vengeance, but you cannot escape my hatred," she almost hissed.

"I will see that your hatred be less fatal to him, than your love has been," Mr. Alton said, with bitter irony, and looked at her so sternly, that she cowered beneath his gaze.

But regaining soon her insolent defiance, she laughed discordantly, bowed mockingly to each of them, and glided swiftly from the room.

After she left, there was profound silence for some moments. At last Mr. St. George said:

"Mr. Alton, I do not believe that you are wise in forcing this desperate woman into marriage. While I know that she has sinned greatly, and deserves punishment, I feel that for your own sake, you should be merciful, and give her at least the freedom of the law. She does not love you, and what happiness can you expect, from a union, which to me, in its hideous mockery, seems more terrible than death."

Mr. Alton had listened with no apparent emotion, but, as he paused for an answer, looked at him so grimly, and smiled with such sardonic irony, that Mr. St. George shuddered. After a moment he spoke, and his voice sounded hoarse and unnatural.

"After all these years of torture, do you comprehend me so little, as to believe that I could be capable of mercy? Ha! ha! you must be mad to talk to me of happiness. No happiness can come to me, but my revenge; and I will have it. To-morrow, she goes from here my wife, or the world shall know her shame."

"Have you no manhood in you to feel pity for a woman, if not for the guilty one, at least for the mother, who has done you no wrong and will suffer tenfold more than the erring daughter?" Mr. St. George asked sternly.

"I proposed to my wife a second marriage, that her mother might never know her guilt; greater mercy or pity than this, I cannot show," was the firm, but somewhat softened answer. "Very well, sir, I shall tell the whole truth to Mr. Vivien and his daughter Clare, and advise them, to urge Miss Tremaine to confess everything and appeal to the law, for protection from you. She has wronged both of us; but I have too much humanity to desire any such retribution, and feel that no disgrace can equal the misery into which you would drag her," Mr. St. George said haughtily.

"You have forgotten, sir, that my wife had the liberty of choice. She has chosen, and I have little fear that she will listen to any voice but pride," Mr. Alton answered, with icy scorn, and seeing that Mr. St. George was preparing to leave, he added,

"If you will go to Mr. Vivien now, and tell him all that you have to tell, I would be glad to see him afterwards, and will wait here."

"I will go at once," Mr. St. George said quickly, having a hope, that Mr. Vivien would be able in some way, to soften the obdurate man.

"We need not part enemies, and I shall perhaps never see you again," Mr. Alton said, holding out his hand for the first time, to Mr. St. George, who took it without a word.

Something like a smile glittered in his eyes and curled his lips; but it was so cynical and cold, that Mr. St. George shuddered, as he looked, and felt intense relief, as he left the room and that saturnine glance. He was still deeply agitated as he crossed the hall and entered Mr. Vivien's study.

With half-closed eyes, Clare languidly reclined upon a sofa, and her father who was reading to her, sat near by. He paused and looked up with surprise; for he had not even known that Mr. St. George was in the house; but as his guest advanced, he rose, and gave him a smiling welcome.

"I have been trying to amuse my invalid," he said, laying one hand tenderly upon Clare's pallid brow.

"You are ill!" Mr. St. George said, with quick anxiety, as she rose and held out her hand to him.

"No! I think not, but I have never been quite myself, since that dreadful day," she answered sadly.

He looked at her, with such appealing tenderness in his eyes, that her own fell beneath them, and she did not again look up, until he startled her, by asking if either of them had seen Miss Tremaine in the last hour.

Since breakfast neither of them had seen her, and they asked in one breath, his reason for the inquiry.

"I wished to know, if she had forestalled me in what I have to tell you," he answered at last. They told him that they had heard nothing, and he continued, "It has been not more than half an hour, since she left me, but in that time had she desired to do so, she would have told you. As she has not, it may be her wish that you should never know, that which I feel it is my duty to reveal to you."

Commencing at once with Mr. Alton's early visit to himself, as nearly as he could remember, he gave them every detail of the exciting scenes, through which he had so recently passed; told them the hour appointed for the second marriage and that he

believed it to be Mr. Vivien's duty, to use every means in his power, to prevent this blasphemy of a most holy sacrament.

"Mr. Alton is still in the parlor," he continued, "go to him, Chester, and if you can, prevail upon him, to spare this wretched woman, both for her own sake and her mother's?"

Mr. Vivien felt Maud Tremaine's disgrace almost as deeply, as if she had been his own child, and pitied her through all her guilt, for the unhappy fate that had overtaken her at last. He had not once interrupted Mr. St. George, and now that he had finished, still sat stunned and motionless. Remembering at last, that it was his duty to protect this erring woman if he could, from the man who was her lawful protector, without a word to Mr. St. George, he rose and went to the parlor.

Clare listened to Mr. St. George with mute incredulous horror, feeling that there must be some mistake, until at last, as he himself had been convinced, so conviction forced its way to her heart, and feeling even deeper shame than her father, in the shame of this unloved sister, she had bowed her face upon her hands, and with bated breath, and quivering nerves, had heard him to the end, wincing at every fresh proof of her sister's infamy, but asking no questions, nor thinking once, of her lover's freedom, so entirely was her mind and heart absorbed in the mournful and wretched story, to which she was listening. When it was all told, remembering only, that the sinning one was a woman and her sister, she suffered almost as keenly, as the

woman who was the victim of her own misguided nature.

Rising impulsively, and saying, "I must go to her, it is my duty," she started to the door; but Mr. St. George laid a detaining hand upon her, and said gently, but firmly:

"To do so, Clare, would be to reveal your knowledge of the unhappy truth, and above all things I do not wish you to do this. It would only add to her already deep shame and mortification, and in no way comfort, or lift the yoke, that six years ago, she voluntarily took upon herself. She will tell her mother all that she desires you to know. I pity her, Heaven knows; for from the desperate man she has so long deluded and deceived, I fear there is little hope of mercy, and that her only refuge from his persecution, will be disgrace; but even that, is far better than the bondage into which he would force her."

"She is his wife, and must remain so until death frees one or the other; but with the feelings that both entertain, the whole world, should be between them," Clare said, with a shudder, as she reseated herself.

Mr. St. George sat down too, and waited for Mr. Vivien's return. Almost an hour passed, before he came in, looking pale and dejected.

"I have done no good, Harold," he said, "this man is a madman on that one subject, and neither argument nor entreaty could move him in the least. Otherwise he seemed a gentleman, for although inexorable in his stern purpose, he expressed deep sor-

row for both her mother and myself, and implored me to spare my wife all knowledge of the truth. There is nothing left for me to do, but to induce Maud to confess the truth to her mother, and let him do his worst. Do not go, Harold, I need your counsel," he said, as he once more left the room, this time, to go to Maud Tremaine. Already she had told her story to her mother, an ingenuous fabrication from first to last. That her engagement to Mr. Alton was an old one, which honor compelled her to fulfill; that Mr. St. George had yielded all claims in his favor, and that the gentleman was by no means rich, although he had been, at the time their engagement was made. That she thought they would go abroad immediately, to be gone for some years, and that she hoped this interruption and sudden turning aside in her life's plan, would give no pain to her mother. This was the substance of what she had said.

Pride and the little reverence and affection that was in her heart, had given her strength and calmness to go bravely through her story. To this wretched woman, the loss of the world's esteem, seemed greater than the loss of happiness, and to keep it, she had bent her proud neck to the yoke. But beyond all this, in her dark hour of trial, seemed the love and tenderness that her mother had given her from her birth, and Percy Dartmoth, from the hour he first knew her; and little as he dreamed it, at this moment there was still enough of woman's softness left in her, to have bartered willingly all that she would purchase at such frightful cost, if by

doing so, she could have won once more his knightly faith. But this she knew could never be; he was lost to her forever.

She too had aimed loftily and fallen low. With her beauty and her genius to command, she had felt that no exaltation was too great for her attainment. Vain aspirations; for disappointment had crowned, each mighty effort; and now to save from the knowledge of her shame, the only heart that trusted her, she must resort to falsehood and equivocation.

Mrs. Vivien heard her at first, with perfect incredulity; it was so hard to believe that her daughter could be guilty of such madness.

"Do you intend me to believe, Maud, that you will let the brilliant destiny, that is within your reach, pass from you, that you may become the wife of this poor man? she asked, and when her daughter convinced her, of the real and awful earnestness of her purpose; she raved, implored and wept, but all to no avail, Maud Trema ine seemed turning into marble, as she listened.

"Heaven knows mamma, I would not give you this unhappiness, but I can not undo the past," she said sadly, (and as her mother was still weeping wildly), bent over her, and added in her gentlest tone:

"Go to father, mamma, he has been always very kind to me; tell him what I have told you and he will comfort you. I wish both of you to believe, for it is true, that if it were possible, there is no sacrifice I would not make to save you from this sorrow

and disappointment." And before her mother could answer her, she was gone.

She had been in her room but a little while, when Mr. Vivien knocked and was admitted. Very gently he revealed to her his knowledge of all that had transpired, and offered to her his counsel and protection, but for some moments she was too much enraged, even to reply.

"The traitorous wretch," she said at last, "could he not have spared me your good opinion? Was my misery not great enough to satisfy his thirst for justice?"

"You wrong him, Maud; it was for your sake he told me; that I might dissuade Mr. Alton from his cruel purpose, or failing in that, induce you to confess to your mother, and demand from him a legal separation."

"His interference was unnecessary; he knew that I had made my choice, and should have known, that nothing could move me from it," she answered, wrathfully.

In vain Mr. Vivien pleaded with her to bury pride, and trust to her mother's love. She would not be persuaded; but when he was about to leave her, she said with some feeling:

"I bitterly regret, father, that you have heard this wretched story; but, since you know it, I can only beg of you to think of me with all the charity that is in your kind heart, and, above all things, keep my secret from my mother. See Percy Dartmoth, and for her sake implore his silence. For her sake, also, if you have any influence with the traitor who has betrayed me to you, bind him to secresy. For myself, I ask nothing from either."

She was deeply agitated, and seeing this, he made one more fruitless effort to change her purpose, then went down to the library, feeling powerless and dejected.

Mr. St. George was alone, Clare having excused herself soon after her father left the room. He had not forgotten that the eventful morning hours, which had brought freedom and the hope of happiness to him, had brought misery to another man, and most bitter shame to a woman; and while he knew himself to be happier than he had been for months, felt genuine pity for their suffering, and was deeply pained when Mr. Vivien told him of his sad failure, and that at the appointed hour the unholy marriage would take place.

# CHAPTER XXV.

# ALL FOR A WOMAN'S FACE.

"Look on me! there is an order
Of mortals on the earth, who do become
Old in their youth, and die ere middle age,
Without the violence of warlike death;
Some perishing of pleasure—some of study—
Some of disease—some of insanity—
And some of withered, or of broken hearts,
For this last is a malady which slays
More than are numbered in the lists of Fate,
Taking all shapes, and bearing many names."
—Byron's Manfred.

THE day on which the chains that bound two wretched lives were to be forged anew, dawned serene and lovely, and in the joyous sunlight there seemed no element of sympathy with the tragedies of life; and yet in the very midst of its glad radiance, a dark one had been enacted, and another soon would be.

The people of Olney were wild with sorrow and excitement, for the untimely taking off, of one of their number. For many hours, no mortal eye had seen him; shut up in his own room, locked away from all observers, alone with his God, who can tell what thoughts or feelings prompted him to solve, so suddenly and forcibly, the mystery of time and of eternity.

They only knew, that startled by a pistol's loud report, the locked door had been opened forcibly,

and Percy Dartmoth found lying prostrate, in one temple a ghastly wound, and in his right hand the fatal weapon still tightly grasped. The hues of life had not yet fled, but one glance at the glazed and sightless eyes, and none doubted that "Death had been."

Tenderly they lifted and laid him upon his bed, and a surgeon was sent for, but, as they already knew, nothing could be done. The immortal spirit had fled from the bondage of flesh, and the evils it is heir to.

"This is the culmination of a madness I have seen for months," said one, who gazed sadly at the stiffening form.

"Ay, you are right," said another, "he has not been himself for many months;" and still another said:

"He was so gifted, so noble, to be thus cut down in the very midst of his usefulness and a brilliant destiny. All, too, for the beauty of a woman's face, a woman as false as she is fair. If she has any soul, I pity her for the ruin she has wrought."

This last speaker had not yet observed that Harold St. George was among them; for, having deep respect for him, in his presence he would have spared his promised wife.

Mr. St. George, chancing to be in the village, was one of those who forced open the door, and found the unfortunate man.

He was sitting by the bedside, his face turned from the crowd. He heard all that was said, but better than any of them he comprehended the fierce torture, which had maddened and overthrown the noble mind. It had been but a few hours since he had seen him in life, bowed down by such anguish as only a royal heart could feel; and now, alas! he was beyond the reach of human sympathy.

With one last mournful look into the dead man's

face, he rose and passed from the room.

At the door he met Sydney Alton, who had only then heard of the dread event; and although it was past nine o'clock, he made his way through the crowd, and stood reverently in the presence of the dead.

All marveled who the stranger was, but from the beauty of that pallid face, his eyes did not once turn.

"I might have been like this long, long ago," he thought, "if knowing well her utter heartlessness could have driven me to it."

"Alas! it may be, I were better so," he muttered, and those who watched him, were startled by the pained and desperate look that came into the dark and haggard face. Without a glance or word for those around him, he turned and left them.

Reaching his room, he looked at his watch, and saw that to be at Claremont at the appointed hour, he had not a moment to tarry. Before the entrance to the hotel, a carriage stood waiting for him; it was also to convey his bride and himself to the train, when they started on their long journey.

When he arrived at Claremont, Miss Tremaine was ready for the ceremony. She had on a simple travelling dress; and plain as it was, it did not de-

tract from her wondrous beauty: but now, there was nothing sweet or tender in it; unnatural excitement dyed her cheeks, and fired her eyes; she never smiled, but laughed loud and often.

All the morning her mother had done nothing but weep and watch her; but as much as she would permit, Clare and Margaret had assisted her in packing. The latter was deeply mystified, by this sudden and singular marriage, and Miss Tremaine's manner, only added to her mystification.

Clare had gone to her room, completely overcome by the horrors of this life drama, in which she too, was acting a part, when Margaret entered, and said that Mr. Alton was waiting below, then added,

"Joseph has brought bad news from the village

Giving her no time to complete what she would say, Miss Tremaine asked excitedly,

- "What is it?"
- "Mr. Dartmoth has shot himself."
- "Is he dead?" she asked with wide open staring eyes.
  - "Yes! he was quite dead, when they found him."

With one wild shriek, Maud Tremaine fell senseless to the floor. The unearthly sound reached every inmate of Claremont, and summoned them to her presence. They used every effort to restore her, but so like death seemed her unconsciousness, and so long their efforts were unrewarded by anything like returning life, that Mrs. Vivien called wildly for a physician and one was sent for; but long before he reached Claremont, Maud Tremaine had been lifted to her feet and had spoken words that seemed branded on each listener's brain.

"This is the first time in my life, that I have been unconscious, and it will be the last," she said, with bitter emphasis, "for the awful cry my heart sent up, was the death agony of all that was left of womanhood in me." Then with no trace of weakness, she turned to her waiting bridegroom and said coldly:

"I am ready."

In awed and solemn silence, father, mother, sister, servants, followed them to the parlor below, where the man of God stood ready to unite them in wedlock's holy bonds.

Dr. Upton, the family physician being absent from home, his son and partner Dr. Alfred Upton, had come instead, and now watched with amazement the strange funereal-like procession. He saw the pale groom and paler bride, stop before the minister, and was an uninvited witness of this most unhallowed marriage, which was the second tragedy of the eventful day. He had known Clare and her parents from boyhood, but Maud Tremaine he had only met a few times since his return from Europe, where he had been studying for the past three years. He had heard her name darkly mentioned in connection with young Dartmoth's tragic death, and without knowing anything of their real history, as he looked at the two restless, cold, defiant faces, and recalled the peaceful almost smiling calm, of that white sleeper in the darkened chamber he had left so recently, felt that Percy Dartmoth even in death, was to be envied, rather than this man, who was in the midst of life and manhood's early vigor.

Short and simple was the marriage service, and for the second time, law and religion pronounced Sydney Alton and Maud Tremaine, man and wife.

Calmly the pale bride turned to her mother, who had been weeping silently through the entire ceremony.

"Oh! my child, my darling, what have you done?" the mother moaned as she took her idol in her arms.

"My duty only, try to believe this, mamma, and to be happy without me; for I am unworthy of your love," Maud Alton said, and disengaging herself from the fond arms that clasped her convulsively, she said farewell to all who were present, and taking her husband's arm, crossed for the last time, the threshold that had welcomed her from childhood.

Wildly and vainly, Mrs. Vivien called to her darling to come back. She neither stopped, nor turned to look; and soon in a deep and death-like swoon, the unhappy mother lost all memory of pain.

# CHAPTER XXVI.

### LOVES THAT HAVE GONE ASTRAY.

La mort est-elle un mal?

A LONG sad week had passed away, and to the wretched despairing mother no word had come, from her absent child.

To Clare, the house seemed desolate, and the very air oppressive, as if the brooding wings of an angry fate, were hovering over it.

From feelings of delicacy, Mr. St. George had staid away, and she had seen and heard only deep sighs and mournful faces. In these dark days, she had thought little of herself, or of the future, from having thought so much of the tragic lives that had been blended with her own.

Of her sister's fate, she could not think, without deep sorrow; for all steeped in guilt and error as she was, there was a feeling in Clare's tender heart, that only a fiend could wish for the erring one, such bitter expiation; and yet, when standing by Percy Dartmoth's grave, she felt with keenest anguish, that his young life had been sacrificed to that sister's vanity alone; and felt too, that unless dead to every noble or generous impulse, it were better for the unhappy woman to be sleeping in death

beside her victim, than to live on, remorselessly pursued by the avenging memory of her crime.

One dreary morning, of the choicest flowers that the autumn's frosts and winds had left, she twined a garland for the dead; and still thinking of that dark inscrutable providence which had visited them so lately, murmured sadly, "Man could have no more fitting time to die than this, in the midst of nature's slow decay."

All nature seemed in sympathy with her melancholy, from the leaden sky above, to the leaves that were falling noiselessly around her.

When the simple token of friendship was completed, she started with it to that new made grave, in the village churchyard. It was not far away, and she soon reached it. Thinking to be as usual, its only visitor, when approaching Percy Dartmoth's grave, she was surprised to see a dark-robed figure bowed over it, in grief's most passionate abandonment; but still greater was her surprise, when becoming aware of another's presence, the mourner lifted a white despairing face, and she saw that it was Lilian Trafton.

She had known this lady well for years, without having once suspected the tender depths of her reserved and shrinking nature; and even the one who should have known her best, the man for whom she was weeping so wildly, did not dream of the slumbering fires, or capacity for suffering, that lay hidden beneath that usually emotionless calm.

They had judged her, as the world, with all its boasted wisdom, too often judges, from external evi-

dence only; and many times rarely endowed natures, for want of recognition, are shut off from the warmth of sympathy, and left to wither and harden, in the coldness, and dreariness of isolation.

In the eyes that were lifted to Clare, there was a mournful far-off look, which touched her deeply; but she did not speak, feeling, that in the presence of this sacred sorrow, so immeasurably greater than her own, all words would be sacrilege. Reverently she placed her flowers upon the grave, and silently as she had come, moved away, leaving the bereaved and sorrowing woman, alone with her dead.

When half way home, she saw Glen Trafton, riding towards her.

"I am very glad to see you, Clare," he said, dismounting, "I have been to the house, and was going away, greatly disappointed at finding you out; but I am fortunate in meeting you, and if you will permit, I will return with you."

"Certainly, Mr. Trafton, I shall be glad to have you do so," she answered pleasantly.

"It is a long time since I have seen you, Clare, but believe me, my sympathy and all my thoughts have been with you," he said, looking at her very tenderly.

"Thank you," she answered simply, without seeing the glance; but the unusual softness of his tone, warned her of approaching danger.

She had long known that he loved her, and liked him too well, and honored him too sincerely, to wish to give him pain; and she knew that she had nothing else to give. He observed her constraint, and although by no means comprehending it, said little more, until they reached the house; but as soon as they were seated, with no little concern, he said:

"You are looking pale, Clare; I fear you have not recovered from the shock of that unfortunate accident."

"It may be possible, but I think, I have had much beside, to retard my recovery," she replied.

"That is true, and I have felt for you deeply, knowing well how your tender, sensitive heart would suffer; but, my dear Clare, you must not permit a misfortune, for which you were in no way responsible, to darken the sunshine of your pure young life."

"Alas! it is easy to say I will and I will not, but when one really feels, such self-command is impossible," she answered, sadly.

He knew that her sister in all minds was held accountable for Percy Dartmoth's terrible death, and he comprehended, even while he regretted, her deep dejection. With inborn delicacy he did not mention that sister's name, nor ask of her sudden and most unusual marriage, but, after a moment, said:

"I know that what you say is true, but none the less I believe it to be our duty, to battle bravely with whatever threatens our earthly or eternal happiness. We owe this to ourselves."

"Yet, however bravely we may battle, however deep our longings, and well-laid our plans, we often miss this thing which all men covet," she replied;

"and I am tempted to believe that happiness lies in hopes, that, alas! have no fruition, and echo in my mind the poet's thought—

"'Man never is, but always to be blest.""

"Clare, Clare, this atmosphere of sorrow has diseased your mind; you are too young to think and feel like this," Mr. Trafton said, moving nearer to her, all the tenderness that was in his heart glowing through his eyes. She saw it, and vainly attempted to stem the tide of this passion, long repressed.

Subject after subject she introduced for his discussion, but they had no interest for him, and were dropped, sometimes without a comment. He had but one thought in his mind, but one hope in his heart. Knowing this, she was almost desperate enough to cry out in her anguish:

"Oh! spare yourself and me, leave all that you would say unsaid." But she could not do this, and, feeling how powerless she was to avert the coming sorrow, at last she, too, was silent.

It has been said, that if he has common instinct, a man need never offer himself in vain to any woman; but this is a mistake, as all must know, who have studied the human heart. For while some, whose love demands an answering passion to perfect and complete itself, failing to meet with this response, withdraws and folds away in silence, the germ that would have blossomed into fairest fruit; others, less sensitive, more hopeful, or demanding less, plunge boldly forward, nor pause to even think

of failure, until the "Rubicon" is passed, and they know too late, how widely astray their hopes have led them. But, sometimes, even the wisest of the former, are deluded and beguiled by the sorceries of women incapable of love, and there is, alas! for them, no resurrection of their buried hopes.

Indeed, at all times, much depends on woman's nature; for while some are ardent, impulsive, and meet half-way the advances of one beloved, others, with native shrinking and reserve, hide all they feel the most, and must be surprised into confession. In short, there is no plummet that can gauge, this most varied, wondrous work of God—the man He has fashioned in His own image.

Glen Trafton's silence was freighted with feelings that had grown with him for years, and now, in their full strength, he hesitated to open his heart and send them forth; but she was so pale and still, so utterly unlike herself, that pity armed him with the courage love could not.

"What is it that grieves you, Clare, dear one?" he asked. "Do you not know that to see you suffer tortures me? Oh, my darling, let me shield you from every sorrow that may come. I love you, Clare, have loved you for these many years. Look up, my love, and let me read in those sweet eyes, that it is not all in vain."

Enduring such agony as he could never comprehend, she heard him, but neither answered nor looked up, and he asked again:

"Will you not speak to me, dear? Oh, tell me that you love me, or will learn to love me."

"I cannot," fell slowly from her trembling lips.

"Do not say that, darling. I cannot bear it. I see that I have asked too much. I have given you no time to think; but you must, you will try to love me," he said, so pleadingly, that it intensified her pain.

"I do not love you as you wish, and can not learn to," she answered him at last, in a sweet, but mournful voice.

"My darling! you do not know your heart, and would banish me from my heaven of hope, without one thought of its capacities. Think, dearest, what my life must be, debarred from every hope that has warmed it to maturity; and let me teach you to love me; for if love ever won response, mine surely will."

He grasped her hands, and with an eloquence that seemed inspired, plead for her love, and implored her to unsay her cruel words, and leave him at least a ray of hope. Beyond her strength she was already tortured, and she had the feeling that unless this painful scene soon ended, at least her own pain could last but little longer. Once more, she heard him say:

"You have never loved, my darling, nor felt the rapture, or despair of passion, and can not pity mine."

"You are mistaken, for I too have loved, and loved in vain; and taught by the immeasurable depths of my own suffering, I pity yours as much as one human soul can pity another."

A mournful wail, these low, sad words came

from her tortured heart; for as she spoke, she remembered only the despair that had well nigh wrecked her life; but now bewildering memories rushed upon her, and the unhappy scenes through which she had so lately passed, came back to her one by one. Delirious thoughts surged through her brain, their sweetness thrilled her heart, and for one moment she forgot, that another and no less loving heart, awaited its doom from her reluctant, trembling lips.

He had been stunned by the unexpected avowal of her love; and awed by the grave and solemn earnestness of her manner, watched her in silence, until she spoke again.

"You have not dreamed of this, no doubt, and I would never have confessed it, only to prove to you my friend, that I have nothing left to give," she said, and once more life's crimson dyed her face.

There was such tender pity and compassion in her voice, that even though she slew his hopes, he felt that she was suffering for every pang she gave, and loving her with all the fervor of his manly heart, to spare her pain, he tried in vain, to hide his anguish.

"God! give me patience to endure," he said, and groaned aloud. For some moments he sat quietly, with closed lips and tightly clenched hands, as if suppressing by mere force of will, an avalanche of passion. At last he rose to his feet and said, with all the self-command, that he was master of:

"I am going to leave you, Clare; I must no

longer pain and torture you, by the evidence of my weakness."

She was sobbing violently and did not heed him, and he continued:

"Some baleful star must have arisen, above the destinies of the Traftons, that is leading their loves astray, only to blight, and darken hopelessly, the lives it has foredoomed."

These fateful, bitter words, were scarcely said, when, if he could have done so, he would have recalled them; for they had stabbed anew, his listener's heart. He read it in her dark, reproving eyes, as she rose, tremblingly, and extended her hand.

"Forgive me, Clare, for all the pain I must have given you; and may God bless and lead you to happiness and peace," he said, with tender earnestness, and bowing above the hand he held, imprinted upon it, one long, despairing kiss; lifted a pained, desperate face to hers; a moment looked, then said farewell, and left her standing in mute and sorrowful regret. She did not love him as he had hoped, and knew that she could have given him no other answer; but from knowing this, she suffered no less keenly in his pain; for he was, and had been always dear to her.

From early childhood her memory was richly stored, with all his many kindnesses; and she felt that no brother could have been more true and tender, than he had been to her.

She had seen with pain his growing passion, had

long feared this blow to his royal heart; and believing with a woman wiser than herself,\* that,

"He comes too near, who comes to be denied," had tried in vain to let him see her heart. He would neither see nor be denied, until he boldly asked.

"Alas! that it should be so," she thought, with deep regret, and recalling the near past, whose bitterness was with her still, she asked herself, if friendship be a thing impossible, between man and woman, since one or the other, must fall a victim, to its most insidious foe.

Through gathering tears her eyes followed Glen Trafton's retreating form; down the lawn through the gate, and out into the highway; then lifting her eyes to Heaven she implored the Divine One to pity, and guide to light and life and joy, this man, who had deserved so much, and found so little.

\*Lady Mary Wortley Montague.

### CHAPTER XXVII.

#### UNTIL DEATH US DO PART.

"Yes love indeed is light from Heaven.

A spark of that immortal fire,

With angels shared, by Allah given,

To lift from earth our low desires."

-Byron.

"Nature posted her parable thus in the skies,
And the man's heart bore witness. Life's vapors arise
And fall, pass and change, group themselves and revolve
Round the great central life, which is Love."

-Owen Meredith.

THE day following Glen Trafton's most unhappy visit, Mr. Vivien left suddenly for New York, telling his family in explanation, that important business, called him there immediately. They knew that he had received both a letter and telegram in the morning; but as he appeared unusually reticent, forbore to ask him questions; knowing that in his own good time, he would tell them everything.

Although he had been gone three days, they had not heard from him as yet, nor had they received from Mrs. Alton, even a single line.

The mother's heart was crushed already, and this cold neglect could add but little pain. Her love had been always self-denying and self-sacrificing; giving much, and asking little.

Clare partly comprehended her sister's reluctance

to write, and her silence neither surprised nor disturbed her. She thought much of her father's mysterious absence, and wondered too, if he had confided its cause to Mr. St. George, knowing that he had kept so little from him.

Restlessly she wandered from room to room; one moment humming a gay ditty, that had not passed her lips for months, and the next stopping suddenly, with much the feeling one will have, when surprised into a smile, amid funereal solemnities, and did penance, for the moment's happiness, with an hour of sad remembrance. All her own life plans seemed growing shapeless; and the career she had marked out seemed purposeless, and no longer allured her; but as yet, she did not wholly realize, or acknowledge to herself, the true reason for this. In fact, of her future she tried to think but little, for its possible sweetness awed and filled her with the fear, that such Heaven-born bliss could not be meant for mortal, and with maidenly timidity and shrinking, day after day, she would put away from her the certainty of happiness, from the mere dread of losing its shadow.

"In the midst of all this wretchedness, must I be so supremely blest?" she asked herself again and again, and always her fond heart answered, "Ay! even so, for beyond all those who sin and suffer, you love one, who loves and lives to bless you."

Mr. St. George she had not seen since her sister's marriage, and had indeed been grateful to him for his considerate absence; and even now, while she

longed to see him, trembled at the thought of it; and dared not trust herself to the delirium of her hopes.

At Olney Heights, Harold St. George was chafing, beneath the restraint that delicacy and common forbearance had put upon him. With the instinct of love, he had divined Clare's heart, and felt that he could offer her no greater kindness than to stay away; but the suspense was maddening. He longed once more to hold her in his arms, and hear from her dear lips the sweet assurance of a love, that in his agony, he once had dared to doubt. He felt himself to be unworthy of this long dreamed of happiness; but no less eagerly, stretched forth his hands to grasp it, and in the midnight hours poured forth his soul, in grateful thanks, to the God whose mercy had withdrawn the avenging sword.

He had not heard of Mr. Vivien's absence, and knew nothing of its cause, when resolving, to end his torturing uncertainty, he approached Claremont.

At the door he asked for Mr. Vivien and Clare.

- "Mr. Vivien is away, but Miss Clare will see you I know," Margaret answered.
- "How long has Mr. Vivien been away, and where is he?" he asked, with surprise.
- "Only three days. He is in New York I believe, sir," was the answer, and she went to announce him to Clare.

Mr. St. George was amazed, and unusually disturbed, at his friend's having gone without notifying him, and thought:

"What new evil can this mean," but he was at

once ashamed of his weakness in grasping at even the phantom of unhappiness, and again abandoned himself to the hope of joy.

He had waited but a few moments when Clare advanced timidly to meet him. He took one trembling hand, looked fondly into the blushing face, and asked softly:

"Am I welcome, dear?"

Even before she spoke, he read her answer in the eloquent eyes, that for one moment were lifted to his.

- "You know that you have always been welcome at Claremont."
  - "And to Clare," he added, questioningly.
  - "Not always, I fear."
- "You are candid. Why not always?" he asked quickly, and she saw a shadow cross his face.
- "Don't question me too closely, or I may say unflattering things," she answered, with the old piquancy that he had missed so long.

She had regained her self-possession, and no longer felt the timid dread of this meeting, that she had felt for days, and more than ever, as she entered the room. Moving to a sofa near the window, she sat down, and asked him to be seated too, but instead he crossed the room once or twice nervously, and at last stopped before her, and looked down curiously, and in silence. She endured the scrutiny for a moment only, and looked up, saying laughingly:

"You appear to be making a study of me, Mr. St.

George. Pray what peculiar phenomenon of the

'genus humanus,' am I presenting to you?"

"I was thinking," he answered, laughing softly, "how much you reminded me, this morning, of the little heroine of the pear tree."

Her lips curled slightly.

"I am not flattered, I assure you, for I have hoped to outlive all trace of that unhappy child."

"Surely you do not mean this, Clare; for worlds, I would not have you outlive the purity and unselfish tenderness, that made me love her."

"You have forgotten, you did not love her."

"I did love her, for a time, unknown even to myself, and the long months that have followed my awakening, have deepened and intensified the love, that would not be destroyed."

She believed that he spoke the truth, and his thrilling earnestness impressed her profoundly. In tremulous silence, she listened, but did not even look up, and he continued:

"The years, the bitter years have taught me, Clare, the meaning of true love; and I believe no spurious passion, could again mislead me. Twice I have bowedall that was noblest in me, with more than pagan blindness and idolatry, before a woman's beauty; and twice have met with direst shipwreck. Each time the dream was brief, the awakening horrible; but, dearest, in all the integrity of my manhood, I swear to you, I never loved them; to my bitter shame I own it. An ardent worship of beauty, and headlong impetuous passions, that could not brook denial, the legacy of my race; joined to the madness of my own belief, that to such matchless perfection, physically, spiritual imperfection was impossible, or if possible, abnormal only, lulled to security those truer instincts, that would, in time, have saved me from my recklessness. Of my wife I have never spoken to you, Clare, nor of those unhappy years, that should have been so blest. As you have seen in her picture, she was very beautiful, but in nothing like Maud Tremaine.

"From first to last she was a child, in her eager instinctive longing for pleasure; and no higher thought seemed ever to find lodgment in her brain. She loved life intensely, and with the keen instincts of animal nature, revelled in its sunshine, and avoided whatever could bring her pain. However freely I opened to her my mind and heart, she would not read, and they remained forever a sealed book; but for all that, from pure malice, I believe she wronged no one, nor ever thought evil of a human being. One love pervaded her life, the only evidence of a soul's existence; this was the love she bore her father. For our little Réné, she seemed to entertain much the feeling that a child will for its toy; amused with it one moment and the next, ready to cast it aside, for some new pleasure. As for myself, I was least of all, in her thoughts and affections. In short I was alone, in that terrible loneliness, from which there is no escape, the bondage of unmated souls."

He paused, overcome by the rush of feelings long buried. She looked up at him, a passion of pity in her glorious eyes, and trembling on her lips; but she did not speak. Seeing all the tenderness in that glowing face, he sat down near her, and said gently:

"Clare, dear one, must my dream of happiness be in vain, or will you trust me with your life? I have no fear, but that you can make mine perfect."

She did not answer, and he could not see the thrilling eyes.

"Look up, my love, my only love; you know all that I have suffered and know, too, how I love you. Then, do not torture me with suspense, I can not bear it," once more he said, entreatingly, eager passion in his eyes, and quivering in his voice.

Nearer he came to her; she could hear his short quick breathing, knew his agony, and with unfaltering trust, slowly lifted to his, her tender love-lit face; and he read the burning words, her lips refused to speak.

"My own, all mine at last, thank God," he said, with passionate emphasis, as he took her to his heart and kissed rapturously, the lovely eyes and trembling mouth.

"My own dear love, have you no words for me?" he asked, with love's soft pleading, and she answered low:

"I love you, and have loved you long. Better than my own life, I love you, and will love you always," then hid her blushing face upon the breast that henceforth would be her shield, from every ill, that human strength can compass. He was too wildly, too supremely happy, to think of aught but present bliss; hour followed hour, and the morning was entirely gone, before he asked Clare of her father's absence.

She told him all she knew, and he was surprised to find it so very little; but thinking that it might be, in truth, a business matter, which if explained, could be of no vital importance to any one but Mr. Vivien himself, he dismissed all thought of it, and the next moment asked tenderly:

"Shall we go now, dear, to your mother, or do you prefer waiting until your father's return?"

"I think I would rather wait," she answered, shrinking from the thought of intruding their joy upon her sad mother.

"Let it be so then; and now, dearest, you must tell me how long my probation is to be," he said, a smile radiating his handsome face.

"I do not understand you," she replied, with woman's prevarication, but in too much confusion he plainly saw, to be precisely truthful.

"I mean, my darling," he said, the tenderness deepening in his eyes, "how soon shall the day come, when you will lay this little hand in mine, and say, 'until death us do part.' I know, beloved, that you are mine, but all the world must know it too," he finished, with earnest warmth.

She had given no thought to anything but their loves; and for the first time recalled the unhappy circumstances that had at last united them, and with innate delicacy shrank from publicity. He felt her start and tremble, and divining its cause instinctively, asked:

"Clare, dearest can it be, that in these arms, assured of a love, man feels but once, you can yet fear the world's verdict? Little coward, I will have none of that," he added masterfully, but with perfect good nature, and held her more firmly.

She drew away from him as she answered gently, but decidedly:

"It is not so much the world's opinion that I fear, as the possible wounding afresh, of my mother's already crushed and bleeding heart."

He had loved her so madly, and longed so intensely, to make her his own, that no thought of this had come to his mind; and he colored with shame, for his selfish forgetfulness; but was by no means prepared for a long engagement, and felt that he could not yield without a struggle if she proposed one.

"I own that my happiness lies in your love, and the hope of one day being your wife, but none the less, I feel that we owe to my mother, to delicacy, and to ourselves, the deferring of our marriage at least one year," she said, with marvelous sweetness, but the same underlying firmness.

"A year, a whole year!" he exclaimed, aghast.
"That would be an eternity to me; you cannot mean this, Clare; or would you drive me mad?"

Almost fiercely he took her in his arms once more, as he continued:

"Dearest, can it be that you doubt my truth,

my constancy, and are thus putting me to this fear-ful test?"

"Mr. St. George, knowing me so well, how can you ask a thing so cruel?" she said, feeling deeply hurt and again moving away from him.

"Mr. St. George," he repeated, "and am I only Mr. St. George to you still, my darling? Have you no dearer name for me?" he asked with such tender pathos, that in her heart, she forgave unasked, the impenitent sinner, and laying her hand upon his blond head, said gently:

"Harold, my love, my darling."

This moment's softness, maddened him again, and once more he plead with all love's eloquence, for a lessening of these days of pain.

"If I could this very hour, before all the world, I would make you mine; then think, beloved, what misery you doom me to in this long torturing year; in which each day will be o'ercast with doubt, suspense and fear," he said with deepening passion.

She loved him tenderly, and pitied him in his disappointment, but convinced him at last, that neither love nor pity could move her from her convictions of right.

"One year from to-day, if you like, Harold, I will be your wife; but, dearest, as you love me, urge me no more to shorten the time. I will see you often and be near you always; and no sorrow can come to you that I will not share. How, then, can our waiting bring such pain?"

He did not answer her, but looked long into the

lustrous eyes that were lifted to his with fondest inquiry.

"Farewell, until to-morrow, and let me warn you now, that unless my perverse love shall revoke her cruel edict, three hundred and sixty-five to-morrows shall herald me a visitor at Claremont," he said at last, and smiled rarely into the eyes that were looking love to his.

Again and again he attempted to leave her, but each time returned as if his love had left unsaid words vital to the happiness of both.

To the gate at last she went with him, and lingering farewells were spoken.

This parting from her lover recalled to Clare Vivien's mind that other and sadder one, when it was her painful duty to send forth to the world a disappointed, desolate, and almost broken-hearted man; and in the midst of her own great happiness, she paid the tribute of a sigh to the unhappy lover, from whom she had not even heard since that sad day.

In the afternoon Mrs. Vivien received a letter from her husband, containing nothing of importance, save that he was quite well, and would be at home in a few days.

At almost the same hour Mr. St. George received a telegram, summoning him to New York. As it was from his friend, it is needless to say that he obeyed it at once. He had no time to see Clare, but left her a farewell note, in which he said nothing that could alarm her, nor left unsaid aught that could re-assure her if alarmed.

It was, however, impossible for her not to connect his sudden and singular absence with her father, and it required all the fortitude and philosophy that had been born of suffering, to prevent her from betraying this anxiety to her unhappy mother.

With morbid self-consciousness, she accepted this new torture as punishment for a happiness that even she had felt at times to be unseemly in the midst of so much gloom, and in the terror and misery of her suspense, dared not hope for its continuance.

No letters came, and an entire week passed bfore Mr. Vivien and Mr. St. George returned.

Clare, whose anxiety had grown almost beyond her powers of repression, met them first, and as she greeted them, saw in both faces the shadow of a coming sorrow. Giving her father no time to speak, she put her arms about his neck, and asked in a faltering voice:

"What is it, father? My heart tells me that something terrible has occurred. What is it?"

"My child, I have indeed sad tidings for you," Mr. Vivien answered, and paused, momentarily, overcome by his emotions.

Clare listened with strained eagerness and wonder, but was wholly unprepared for the mournful news he had been forced to bring her.

"For your sister Maud we fear the worst," he continued, sadly. "Since the hour they arrived in New York, Mr. Alton has never seen her. When they reached the hotel, he conducted her to the reception-

room, and going straight to the office, procured rooms and returned; but his wife was nowhere to be seen, and for a long week, with the aid of the New York police, he searched for her day and night. At first, believing it some mad freak to punish him, he had a hope that she would return; but as day followed day, and she did not come, he first wrote, then telegraphed to me, and as you know, on the same day I received both. After I reached there, all past efforts were redoubled; but they were in vain, and in my despair I telegraphed for Harold. I needed his counsel and assistance, as by that time Mr. Alton was half-crazed, and incapable of thought or action. He came at once, God bless him; and I believe we left no clue unfollowed, and nothing undone that could have traced the missing one, if she had been alive; but, darling, at last the conviction forced itself upon us that she was not, and had, alas! too surely found a watery grave."

"Oh! my mother, her mother," Clare moaned aloud, as Mrs. Vivien, who had been summoned, by the noise of their arrival, entered the room. She heard Clare's words, and wild with apprehension, rushed to her husband and asked excitedly:

"Is Maud ill, Chester? Has anything happened to her?"

Her coming was so sudden, that for a moment he could not speak, and she almost shrieked:

"Oh! tell me, or you will drive me mad."

"Adah, my darling wife, when we have reached your own room, I will tell you everything," he said,

gently, and putting one arm tenderly about her, led her from the room.

Clare saw them go, and weeping bitterly bowed her face upon a table near her. In sorrowful silence, Mr. St. George had been looking on, and now seated himself beside her, and laid one hand caressingly, upon her head. Neither spoke, and in this silence a half hour passed; then rising, Clare said mournfully:

"Harold, dearest, I am going to my mother, and must say farewell."

He made no effort to detain her, but led her to the door, kissed softly the hand he held and said:

"Good-by, my love, I pity you in your sorrow, even as I love you."

When she was out of sight, he returned to the library, where he awaited Mr. Vivien's return. He knew the story that his friend would tell to the stricken mother. That in a fit of temporary insanity, it was supposed, her daughter had wandered to the river and been drowned, and that, although the body had not been found, no doubts remained in their minds. How tenderly she had loved that daughter, he knew, and pitied deeply the heart he could not comfort. He had been left alone almost an hour, when Mr. Vivien returned.

"Oh! Harold, this is terrible," he groaned, as he seated himself; "she is so white, so still, in her mute, agonizing grief, that I cannot bear it. If she would only weep, rave, do anything but look like that. It breaks my heart."

Mr. St. George said all that could be said to comfort him, and before he left, promised to return that night.

Hour after hour, Mrs. Vivien remained in the same stony apathy, with scarce a sign of life or movement, except those dry, despairing eyes, that turned mournfully from husband to child. No sound escaped her lips, and as time passed, and she did not change, Mr. Vivien's alarm increased, and in his anxiety he sent Joseph for Dr. Upton.

When the doctor arrived, he told him all the sad circumstances before taking him to his wife's room.

Clare had prevailed upon her mother to lie down, and was sitting by the bedside, holding her hands, when they entered. Mrs. Vivien manifested no surprise at the doctor's presence, and in truth seemed not to observe him. He took her hand, as he seated himself in the chair Clare had vacated, and looked at her intently, but attempted no conversation.

When he left the room, Mr. Vivien followed him to the library below, and asked, with an anxious face:

"What do you think of her, doctor?"

"I think that this blow has been sudden, and very terrible, and that we must do all we can, to relieve her at once," was the answer.

He did not say, that he feared for her brain, but from the prescriptions, and his ordering ice to her head, Mr. Vivien knew that he did.

"Send Margaret to your wife, Chester; she is a

good nurse, and a good one is needed," Dr. Upton said when leaving.

Each hour proved to the anxious husband, that his fears were only too well founded, and when the doctor came a few hours later, he found his patient delirious, and fever advancing rapidly.

Dark, terrible hours followed these, for the wretched husband and child, but all that human skill, and human love could do for the unhappy sufferer, was done. Dr. Upton or his son, were with her almost constantly, and Harold St. George did not leave Claremont, but was there ready to do whatever might be required.

There were long, agonizing days of suspense, when the soul seemed to tremble and wing itself for flight; then arrested by God's mysterious will, and those agencies he had seen fit to use, it paused, and sank back, to almost deathlike torpor, and those who were watching in so much anguish, knew that there was hope.

She lived, but long and tedious was her convalescence. Clare seldom left her side, and was often repaid for her devotion, by tender kisses, and sweet, sad smiles.

In this pale mourner, none would have recognized the proud, handsome woman, who in her ambition for her darling would have sacrificed the happiness of so many. Slowly but surely she regained her strength, and as usual went about her household duties; but both father and daughter felt with sorrow, that her heart was not in them.

Through the holidays, the gloom that hung over

Claremont, seemed to some extent to shadow the neighborhood and village of Olney. Even among the young there was but little gayety, and the new year came in almost unheralded; for Mr. St. George felt that, under existing circumstances, all merry making at Olney Heights would be out of taste if nothing more; and at the Trafton's there were too many sad hearts, to even think of hospitality. Of course at Claremont nothing of the kind was expected, and as these families had taken the lead in social events, society was naturally depressed.

Glen Trafton had gone weeks before to a Western city, with the intention of making it his home. To Clare he never repeated that one sad farewell; but left without seeing her again. Judge Trafton bitterly regretted his son's decision, and preferred him to remain in his native place, where, as part owner of the mills he was prospering well; but seeing that his purposes were fixed, no longer opposed them.

Not one of Mr. Trafton's family divined the cause of his sudden leaving; for he had been so reticent in his love making, that they did not even suspect that he loved; and Clare had been too generous to betray her rejected lover, even to her betrothed.

When Glen Trafton's sister, who was her one dear friend, in her presence, wept for her brother's going, she took her lovingly in her arms, and with keenest sympathy wept also; but allowed no word to pass her lips, that could betray a secret both had kept so well.

At this time a series of festivals were inaugurated, for the purpose of raising funds, to be devoted to the furnishing of a new church that had been built and presented by Mr. St. George, to the congregation. The enterprise was in itself commendable; but the pleasure and excitement to be derived from the entertainments were doubtless an added attraction, for both old and young seemed to devote their best energies to making it a success.

One morning as young Dr. Upton was leaving home, he said to his father:

"I am going to the festival hall, and will offer my services for a short time; as I have not been there during the week, I think it is my duty; but should you need me, send for me at once."

The thing that he proposed doing, was in itself unusual, as in the six months he had been at home, he had devoted but little time to social life and its pleasures. He was therefore prepared for some surprise; but scarcely for his father's question, asked with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes:

"Are you quite sure, my son, that it is not a pair of dark eyes rather than zeal for the church that is leading you there."

"As I have no idea whose eyes you mean, you may judge how innocent I am of the charge," the young man answered good-humoredly, but blushing slightly.

"You do not mean to tell me, Alfred, that you have again and again looked into those tender, thrilling eyes; and never felt that they alone could win an Upton's heart. Ah! that blush betrays you,

and it is well for you my boy, that Father Time cannot take back from me a score of years, or else I might prove a dangerous rival."

The old man paused as if for an answer, but as his son seemed still unenlightened, he continued:

"What, ignorant still! fie on you, for an Upton! Those glorious eyes light too, a face fair as a seraph's; there is but one such face among us; you must divine my meaning."

"You mean Clare Vivien. I own father, that she is very beautiful; as beautiful as woman need ever be," young Upton answered, then added with a smile:

> "But what care I how fair she be, If she be not fair for me."

"Faint heart never won fair lady," quoted the father, sententiously.

"Are you so blind, father, as not to see, that it would be madness, for me to love Clare Vivien; when those lovely eyes turn ever to another, and he alone has power to awaken those tender, thrilling glances that you speak of," the young man asked, and Dr. Upton testily replied:

"Stuff and nonsense, Clare is a child and has not dreamed of love."

"If I am not greatly mistaken," the son said, "this same blindness, with which you are afflicted, has already darkened one noble life. For I believe Glen Trafton loved Clare Vivien, and asked her in vain to be his wife. He confided his secret to no one, and this girl is too intrinsically noble, to boast

of her conquest; hence no one can be positive; but none the less I believe it, and while I am not quite positive of this, I know that she loves Harold St. George, and since that dreadful day, when her young life was so nearly sacrificed, in my mind, I have not doubted, that he loved her in return. While I knew him to be the betrothed husband of another, I felt that to Clare alone he had given his heart, and loving both of them as friends, I cannot tell you with what deep delight, I witnessed that strange and fateful marriage, which gave him freedom."

"Can you not be mistaken, my son?" the father asked.

"No! in this I am not mistaken, although it is not publicly known, for Mr. St. George's intimacy with Mr. Vivien is of such long standing, that his daily visits are unnoticed; but mark me, it will soon be known to all, that he is Clare Vivien's accepted lover," was the decided answer.

"Well, well, I was never more surprised in my life," Dr. Upton said, then, with a tender, quizzical smile in his fine eyes, he asked:

"Are you quite sure, my son, that you can look calmly on, and feel no pang of regret?"

"Quite sure," the son answered, "for it would be impossible to regret, that which I have been too wise to covet."

He did not add, what would have been so truthful, that he had found in another's eyes, the tenderness and light, he hoped would make his sunshine; for this hope he had not even confided to Agnes

Trafton, and therefore could not to his father; but with an abrupt good-morning, left him to ponder over this shattered scheme of happiness for his son.

From childhood Clare Vivien had been the darling favorite of the old man's heart, and with tenderest ardor, she had returned his manifested love, and paid him all the reverence and respect due to his years. He had watched her through her long illness, with a father's love and care, and with a father's joy had seen at last, approaching health. For months the wish had grown upon him, that his son would make her his wife; but the airy bubble had bursted, and for some moments, in his great disappointment, he was unable to rejoice in her happiness. But soon he buried from sight all selfish wishes, and from the depths of a generous heart thanked God, that she loved so worthily and was so well beloved.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## LA VETURIE.

"Her wondrous beauty drew
The gaze and admiration of all eyes;
Not less than if some strange star in the skies,
Or blazing comet's more resplendent tire
Appeared; a murmur far before her flies,
And crowds press round to listen or enquire
Who the fair pilgrim is, and soothe their eyes' desire."

-Tasso.

MORE than a year had passed, since the bright morning when Harold St. George and his young wife said farewell to home, and the myriad friends, whose blessings followed them to foreign lands; and yet they were wanderers still. In time hallowed and inspiring Rome, they had remained the first winter; and to Clare it was a season of rapturous delight; the realization of her most golden dreams. To be in Italy, the land of poetry, love and song, with one so tenderly and so passionately loved; to be in Rome, that imperial city of the arts, where at every turn her eyes mould meet some monument of past genius, and be assured, that whatever rapture she might feel, would meet responding rapture in the eyes she loved; what greater bliss could mortal hope for? And often in the solemn stillness, as they stood beneath St. Peter's lofty dome, or wandered through basilicas less renowned, gazing with wonder and delight, at each

new proof of man's almost God-like genius, with which the walls were glowing, she would ask herself this question, and devoutly thank her Heavenly Father for their perfected lives.

With as keen an appreciation of the beautiful as herself, Mr. St. George in her pleasure and sympathy, enjoyed anew, and as he had never done, beauties in both art and nature, that in other days had palled upon his blighted heart; and more than once he had said to her with all a lover's tenderness:

"Until now, dearest, I have never lived, for my whole life has been one long hope without fruition; but the fair ideal that through all the sin and blindness of my past, was still most cherished, and most longed for, I have found in you, my own, my wife."

Reluctantly, and almost with tears, they said farewell to the sunny land that had been a paradise of love, and journeyed to the East.

Through its most storied countries they wandered; and even though arid deserts and rugged mountain paths sometimes beset their way, they felt themselves repaid for all their toil, by scenes and wonders long renowned.

In Palestine, the land made sacred by the footprints of the God adored by every Christian heart, they visited each spot that religion has consecrated to His memory, and His worship, and left them with no mocking skepticism in their hearts, but with a feeling of tender reverence, for those whose love and faith would cherish and preserve to generations yet unborn, His birth and burial-place.

"What matters it, if even they are mistaken, and

God in His wisdom has seen fit to remove from earth all trace of His divine presence, as surely as He has removed from man's intrusion, that lovely garden, from which our first parents were driven with flaming swords; let science do its worst, the love is beautiful, the faith sublime," Clare St. George had said with enthusiasm, in answer to the inquiry, if she believed it possible for all the traditions of these people to be true.

It was their last day in Jerusalem, once the delight of God's chosen people, and within whose walls had blazed the glory and splendor of Solomon's throne and temple, and, even in its decay, sacred to three religions.

They were seated, with a party of fellow-travelers, in one of those lovely and picturesque gardens that are so common on the house-roofs in the East, taking their last look at the holy city. In the view were blended Moslem mosque and Christian temple, and thinking of that banished race, whose wisdom and splendor had made Jerusalem famous before all the world, she had asked, involuntarily:

"Will the day ever come, when the children of Abraham shall come again to their own, and once more restore these crumbling walls to their pristine beauty and glory?" And one of the party answered:

"Faith worketh wonders, and there is great faith in Israel."

It had been months since then, but now in the gay city of Paris, in the midst of its modern splen-

dor and alluring pleasures, she recalled with emotion that one day, so steeped in the memories of a vanished past. She was in the Hotel du Louvre, and quite alone, Mr. St. George having gone to see the American minister, and Réné and Celestine for a walk. Growing weary of her book, she had thrown it aside, and abandoning herself to these memories of a near and half-regretted past, sat looking dreamily out upon the Rue de Rivoli, when she was startled by Réné's sudden entrance.

"Mamma, mamma! we have seen her, Celestine and I, have seen the beautiful actress la Véturie. We were coming from the Champs-Elysées, and met her driving down the Rue de Rivoli in a splendid carriage; a crowd followed, and from them we learned who she was," the child said, excitedly.

"Is she, my child, as beautiful as we have heard?"

"Oh, yes, mamma! so beautiful, she almost took my breath away," Réné answered, impetuously.

Mrs. St. George looked smilingly into the eager, flashing eyes, and turning to Celestine, asked:

"Did you see her too, Celestine?"

"Oh! yes, I saw her, but not well, for at the first I did not know she was the lady so greatly celebrated, and of whom we have so much heard. When I did know, it was too late; madam had passed; but mademoiselle, I think, saw her quite well."

At Rome, Naples, Florence, or wherever they had been in the past four months, this wonderful woman had preceded them, and left behind her

marvelous stories of her surpassing charms. From whence she came none knew truly, and although some thought her Italian, and some English, she was most generally conceded to be French, and from fair Provence.

"We have overtaken at last, Harold, the beautiful actress, of whom we have heard so much. She is here in Paris; Réné saw her a few moments since; and if she be playing, you must take us to see her this very night," Clare St. George said to her husband as he entered the room, with quite as much eagerness in her manner as Réné a little while since had manifested, when relating her recent adventure.

"Of course I will take you," Mr. St. George answered, smiling at her enthusiasm, and putting one arm around her, he looked down tenderly into the eloquent eyes, and continued: "I suppose my young beauty worshiper, must allude to the famous la Véturie. She is playing an engagement here, and all Paris is at her feet. The people are wild with enthusiasm, and old men and young men, wise men, and simpletons, have alike lost their heads, to her incarnate loveliness. Of her genius I hear but little, and presume that in comparison with her matchless beauty, it is but little thought of. They say that she smiles on none, or rather smiles on all, but serenely keeps her unapproachable heights; and that into the frozen calm, which walls her heart, no man has dared intrude. In fact, my love, I have heard so many marvelous stories told, of this paragon of all the graces, that in a day I could scarce relate

them. I believe, however, that her most noted peculiarity, being a beautiful woman, is, her positive refusal to sit for a picture. That this is true, you have already heard; and it is said, that nowhere on the continent of Europe, or so far as known in the world, is there a picture of her in existence, although artists, inspired by the memory of her beauty, have attempted in vain, to convey to canvas, the loveliness, that defies them. But, my child, if you have seen this miracle of beauty, tell us what she is like," he concluded, laying his hand caressingly on Réné's head.

"Like nothing I have ever seen on earth, papa. Her hair looked like threads of gold, and her face was white as marble, and as perfect as that of the Venus we saw in the Uffizzi gallery," she answered.

"O, young enthusiast! listening to you, no wonder mamma has been infected. I must remove the spell of this enchantress, and can think of no better way, than taking both of you to see her," he said jestingly, as he left them, with the intention of procuring seats if possible.

He knew that evening was to be one of those famous "first nights," which seemingly all Paris desires to see, and only a very small minority succeed in seeing; and understood perfectly that it would be a difficult thing to do; but had lived sufficiently long in Paris to be well acquainted with its best methods in all such emergencies, and really succeeded, with less trouble to himself than he had anticipated.

When they entered the theater it was already crowded with an eager expectant audience. Madam

Véturie was to appear in a new rôle. Her fame was already established, but the play was for the first time to come before the public, to receive from its caprice, the verdict of "life or death."

From the time the curtain rose, there was breathless stillness through the house. It was near the end of the act, when amid tumultuous applause, la Véturie made her first entrance. Spell-bound, each listener caught the intonations of that melodious voice. Her beauty was only half revealed, but by the power and sweetness of the unrivaled voice alone, she swayed the vast audience, and led them on in rapture from tenderest pathos, to profoundest passion; until in the midst of thundering applause, the curtain fell.

That thrilling voice had reached a listener's heart, and stirred some chord of memory anew. Harold St. George turned wonderingly to his wife, as if to find response to thoughts that were scarcely framed; but she was looking intently towards the stage, and seemed unconscious of his glance.

"How marvelously that voice is like one I have heard," he thought, and wondered if Clare had observed it too; but had no intention of reminding her of it, if she had not.

Once more Véturie was on the stage, and her audience listened breathlessly. For once she seemed inspired, and surpassed even herself. Her most ardent admirers, felt that they had undervalued her talents, and given undue prominence to her beauty.

Again, and again, Mr. St. George fancied that he met her glance.

"Can I be mistaken," he thought, "for I could almost swear, that there is recognition in those beautiful eyes." Once more he turned to his wife; but she seemed utterly absorbed, and her eyes did not move from that face on the stage.

Again the scene changed, and this time Madam Véturie's beauty was adorned with all the splendor, that grace or fashion could suggest. No disfiguring head-gear, concealed the waving golden hair, that in rich masses crowned the regal head, which needed from art no other adornment.

Her beauty was so dazzling, that the applause was still more deafening than it had been before.

Unconsciously Clare grasped her husband's hand; he felt her tremble, and looking, saw that she was pale.

"What is it, dear?" he asked more calmly than he felt, for he was at last assured, that the surpassing loveliness before him, was the same that he had once loved madly; and that, too, but little changed. Only more developed, more commanding; and art had turned to burnished gold, hair which had been purest flaxen. Yes! he felt it! knew it! Madam Véturie, was Maud Tremaine in the splendid maturity of her always matchless charms.

Although he had not so expressed himself, he had never believed her dead, and this unexpected meeting was not to him, the startling surprise that it was to his wife, with whom it seemed almost a resurrection from the dead.

She did not answer him in words, but lifted to

his, eyes filled with shocked and questioning appeal. He read their meaning and replied at once:

"Yes, dearest, it is she! Almost from her first appearance, I have believed that I recognized her voice; but until this moment, could not be positive."

With a low moan she sank back. Those in the nearest boxes believed her to be ill, and for a little while, the beautiful dark-eyed stranger divided their attention, with the lovely heroine, on the stage.

Mr. St. George bent tenderly over her, and whispered softly:

"Try to be calm, love; if possible, I do not wish her to see that we recognize her. I am quite sure, that she saw us soon after her first entrance, and watches us narrowly."

"I will try, Harold," she answered faintly, and he saw with alarm, that she was really ill.

"We will go now dear, if you prefer it," he said anxiously; but she declined, thinking it best to remain, as the play would soon be over.

Réné too, had at last recognized the beautiful woman, she had once tried so vainly to love, and looked with vague and curious wonder, at both father and mother. Partly she comprehended Clare's agitation, but said nothing and only took one cold hand affectionately in hers.

With a kind of weird fascination Clare's ears took in the music of that heavenly voice, and her eyes followed the almost angelic vision. Once only she met those lovely eyes, and shuddered at the fancy, that almost a basilisk's power was in their glance.

In torturing suspense, she awaited the end, which soon came, and for the last time, the curtain fell.

To thundering encores, Madam Véturie came, and in acknowledgment, bowed her queenly head. In the past, by the power of her transcendent beauty, the unutterable sweetness of her voice, and those nameless witcheries that enthrall the heart, she had won triumph after triumph; but on this night for the first time in her life, she had been great.

The play had suited her, and passions that had lifted her beyond herself, had electrified the heroine she personated. No triumph could have been more complete than hers, and from that night, the play was famous.

As Mr. St. George bewildered and amazed, was leading his wife and daughter from the theater, a neatly folded note was handed to him; he saw that it was addressed to Clare; but as she had not observed it, put it in his pocket, thinking it best to deliver it when at home. Scarcely a word was spoken, until they reached their own apartments; when overcome by the agitation she had endured so silently, Clare threw herself into her husband's arms, and abandoned herself to violent weeping.

"Oh, Harold!" she said at last, "what are we to do? think of the long cruel lie she has been living, and the agony she has given her mother. How could she do it? We must see her, Harold, and prevail upon her to return with us."

"We will do as you think best, my dear, although I have little hope, that this beautiful and famous woman, will listen to our entreaties; but

at any rate, we must see her." At this moment remembering the note, and thinking that it might be from her, he took it out and handed it to his wife.

With breathless haste she unfolded it, and read aloud:

"MRS. ST. GEORGE,

DEAR MADAM, -Why do I read, such shocked disapprobation in your face to-night, when, if you will remember, and you spoke the truth, it was once your fixed intention, to adopt the life that I have chosen. I told you then, that I was best fitted to adorn the stage; and feel some pride in the assurance, that I have not disgraced my noble art. You have, no doubt, believed me dead, and in your heart feel that it were better so: but of that, no matter. My motive in writing, is to request you, to leave undisturbed, the grave in which, almost three years ago, I buried a wretched past. I ask this, not only for my own, but for the sake of the only human being I love on earth, my mother. For all the anguish she must have suffered, I pity her profoundly; but, knowing her nature, you must feel with me, that her sorrow for the dead is better than a living agony. If you would open those healing wounds, reveal my existence: for I would disappear at once, and this time more surely than before. In conclusion, without wishing to be ungracious, I will say, that I think it will be best, that we do not meet. I shrink with horror, from every link that can connect me with the past. Farewell forever. VETURIE."

"Oh! Maud, Maud, how you have misunderstood my heart," Clare exclaimed. "Shocked, it is true I was, but not at the actress, in whom I could have justly felt pride, but at the woman, and the daughter. What must we do, Harold?"

Taking her gently in his arms, Mr. St. George answered:

"She did not mention me, dear, nor forbid my coming, and I will go at an hour when she receives,

and will scarcely be denied. She lives, I hear, in splendid apartments, and entertains most regally. When once I am admitted, I can outstay all other guests, hear from her own lips whatever she may have to say, and as it is your wish, use every argument that I can frame, in persuading her to return with us to her mother."

"Ask, too, Harold, if she will not see me."

"I will ask her, if she would like to see you, for my wife shall be not even her sister's unwelcome guest," he answered, with a touch of pride.

On the following day, Mr. St. George procured Madam Véturie's address, and at the proper hour, with no little trepidation, presented himself. When he entered her salon, it was already well filled, with her admirers of both sexes. Her self-possession was perfect, and there was no ray of recognition in her eyes, as she greeted him coldly, but politely, and after a few words, turned to another guest. Fortunately for him, he met several acquaintances, and to some extent his embarrassment was relieved.

She did not again address him until they were alone. He was sitting at a table, examining listlessly, a book of rare engravings; when looking up he saw that she was at last disengaged. For one moment, she looked at him in haughty silence; but approaching, she pointed to the engravings, and asked with the faintest irony in her voice:

"Is Monsieur a connoisseur in those things?"
Somewhat confused, he answered at random:

"Oh! no, by no means, but I think these very fine."

- "Thank you; they are my own selections," she said blandly; and after seating herself, as he said nothing, continued:
- "A friend told me this morning, that Monsieur had traveled much, and had but recently arrived in Paris."

Seeing that she was determined not to throw aside her mask, he boldly said:

- "You must know that I did not come here to see Madam Véturie, the renowned actress, but Maud Alton, the sister of my wife."
- "And the woman you once grossly insulted," she added, with indignant emphasis.
- "In your heart, you know that I had no such intention," he answered gravely.
- "How dared you, unbidden, intrude upon my privacy?" she asked, with deepening scorn.
- "For the sake of those I love better than my pride, I have come to you this morning, as a suppliant; and, madam, no scorn can prevent my saying, all that I came to say," he answered firmly.
- "You can have nothing to say, that will have any weight with me; but that I may be soon rid, forever rid, of your presence, say all that you have to say, and say it quickly," she said, in hot disdain.
- "It pleased you, madam," he commenced, "to misjudge last night, your sister's agitation; for you must know her noble heart too well, not to have known, that it was the daughter, who had doomed to years of torturing suspense and misery, the mother who adored her, and not the actress she condemned."

"Can you, Harold St. George, knowing all that dreadful past, no matter what my sin had been; can you censure me, for freeing myself from a marriage, both hideous and revolting?" she asked, pointing one white finger at his face.

The question staggered him. He did not answer, and she continued:

"Was it not better for my mother, loving me as she did, to be left in ignorance of my shame and misery; and to believe that I quitted forever, the world in which I had erred so greatly?"

As he looked at her then, her beauty seemed ennobled by the dignity and earnestness of genuine emotion, and while he knew that both duty and affection should have prompted her to bury pride, confide in her mother, and demand a lawful separation from the man who was not, and in truth had never been a husband to her, knowing so well her proud spirit, and remembering that her religion granted no divorces, he could not find it in his soul to utterly condemn her. He shuddered as he recalled his own unloved shackles, and with a man's strong instincts of freedom, almost believed her right; but remembering his promise to his wife, he answered:

"What you say may be true, and neither do I censure you for what you have done; but it is not yet too late for you to repair much that you may regret. Return with us to your mother, and I feel that your whole life will be filled with love."

"You must be mad to propose a thing like that to me. I know my mother's pride too well, to believe she could be happy in my restoration, knowing the shame from which I fled; and know it she must, at least in part, should I return. But more than this, the man from whom I fled still lives, and is as relentless as fate, and more pitiless than death. Think you that I could so rashly endanger my freedom? No, never! All-conquering as I am I shall remain, until time itself dethrones me. Go, Harold St. George, to those who sent you; say, that my life and theirs must forever flow apart. My mother loves me, dead, and it is as well. I have long believed that I wronged your wife in both thought and deed, and although I have never loved her, if she can forgive me I will be glad of her forgiveness."

"And you will see her," he asked eagerly, feeling that Clare could have so much more influence with her than himself.

"No! a thousand times no! already I have endured too much. If she had come in your place, it would have been more fitting; but it is now too late to undo the mistake, and let me tell you that you owe this audience to my respect for your wife, and love for my mother, alone. But for them, I would have dismissed you from my presence, with the loathing scorn I feel."

She had risen to her feet, and in her passion seemed again, the beautiful, almost demoniac woman who, years before, so wrathfully defied him. He rose slowly, and bowing with haughty grace, said calmly:

"Your loathing I regret, madam, but regret far more, believe me, your harsh decision." A wintry smile curved her red lips, as she answered, scornfully:

"No doubt you feel it deeply, but we will not prolong this interview by discussing it."

After a slight pause, she said again:

"I will not see your wife, but if you will leave her address, I will write and tell her all that she can wish to know."

Without a word, he took out card and pencil, wrote the address, and feeling himself to be summarily dismissed, said:

"Good morning," with frigid politeness, and left her.

Several days passed, and they heard nothing from Madam Véturie, save through the press and public acclaim.

At last a letter came to Clare, in which she gave her, as briefly as possible, the history of her past, and plead her own cause eloquently. Told her, too, of how she had fled from Mr. Alton, and going straight to a jeweler she had known in other days, had disposed of the immense solitaires she wore in her ears, and two valuable rings, and with the proceeds made her new start in life. Completely disguised, in a quiet boarding-house in New York, she remained four weeks. When they had ceased to look for her, in the same disguise, she took passage for Europe, and, arriving in Paris, commenced at once preparing for the stage. Six months were spent in Paris, and six in Florence.

"At the end of twelve months," she wrote, "in this city I made my first appearance, and was successful. Since then you have, perhaps, heard something of my career, etc." She told, also, of how she had kept herself posted as to all that was occurring at home; and of her seeing Mr. Alton, herself unseen, in both Naples and Rome.

"He is the goading Nemesis from which I shrink with terror, the one human being that I fear," she frankly stated; and again: "I do not believe that he thinks me dead, and I am convinced that these years have been to him one long, fruitless search; but he does not dream of finding Maud Alton in la Véturie, and seeks for me in other paths. Motives scarcely comprehended by myself have impelled me to this confidence. I refrain from asking you not to betray me, feeling that with you my secret is safe. In conclusion, let me ask of you to forgive whatever wrong I may have done you in the past. Be to my mother more than I have been, or could ever be; and be, also, what I have not been, and never will be, happy. Farewell, forever."

Thus ended the strange letter, and much as Clare desired to see her, under the circumstances, she was far too sensitive to think of intruding.

Yet loth to leave her, they lingered long after the time appointed for their departure, hoping that something might occur, to change her determination, or that she would at least see them if nothing more.

Each day had seemed to crown her with fresh laurels, and wherever they had been la Véturie was the theme of every tongue. One evening, at a brilliant reception, Mrs. St. George met for the first time, a

rich young nobleman, of whose eccentricities and extravagant living, she had heard much. Soon after being presented to her, he asked, if she had seen Madam Véturie, how she liked her, and if she did not think her very beau iful; to all of which questions, Clare answered affirmatively, but with painful constraint.

"I think her," said he, "the most remarkable woman I have ever met. To begin with, she is a consummate actress; not that she is a brilliant genius, by any means; but she has those subtle intuitions, that divine almost at a glance, our hearts' capacities and needs; and to minister to these, brings all the power of her wondrous beauty, and the witching sweetness of her voice; then with feigned sympathy and emotion, leads us whither she will. As with individuals, so with her vast audiences, and none who do not know her well, could believe, that this beautiful, and seemingly emotional, and impassioned woman, is really as passionless and emotionless as any sculptured marble."

He spoke with bitterness, and Clare learned afterwards, that he had been, and was still, Madam Véturie's most ardent lover; and that he had followed her over the continent and made to her vainly, repeated offers of marriage.

A few evenings after the reception, and the last of Madam Véturie's engagement, at the end of the last act, when the curtain was about to fall, in an obscure part of the theater, a dark, haggard looking man rose suddenly, and reaching out towards

Véturie one menacing hand, said with thrilling emphasis:

"At last!"

Through the entire evening he had watched her, with fierce intensity, and those who were seated near, had heard him groan aloud; but at the time, believing him to be mad, or some rash enthusiast, in their pre-occupation, scarcely noticed him.

To the fair woman, who was so soon to bid them farewell, those words seemed blighting. She reached one hand to her brow, and for a moment held it there, as if dazed by some sudden blow. Her lips seemed frozen, and for the words that should have come, there was only a low, almost inaudible sigh. The curtain fell, and la Véturie was hidden forever, from her admiring audience.

Loud and repeated encores were unresponded to, and at last the manager came before the curtain, and said that Madam Véturie was suddenly ill, and it was impossible for her to acknowledge their call.

The next morning Mr. St. George heard of her sudden illness, also of the singular stranger and at once interpreted it aright. He told his wife and asked her to go with him to Madam Véturie.

"She will surely now listen to reason," he said, "for she must see, that it will be far better to go home, confess all to her mother, and be ably protected from this man's persecution, should he attempt any."

With hope revived, they went to her apartments, but found that she had vacated them early in the morning, and they could learn from no one where she had gone, or in what direction. They hoped to find some message from her when they returned, and were again disappointed.

In the afternoon, Mr. St. George heard that an American had died suddenly, either the night before or that morning, in the Hôtel du Louvre. He was found dead in his room, and a post-mortem examination revealed that he had died from heart disease. On inquiry, he learned that the dead man's name was Alton; and going at once to the proper authorities, as a friend, took possession of the body.

From his papers, old letters, and memoranda, Mr. St. George, understood much of the life he had led for the past few years; but one idea seemed to permeate it, an almost vengeful search for his missing wife. What money he had accumulated, previous to his last return, was invested in bank stock in New York, and on the small income from this, he had led his restless, wandering life. But it was all over at last, and the unquiet spirit at rest.

Mr. St. George had pitied deeply, the unhappy man, and felt that death was a gain to him, since his life held no promise of happiness or usefulness.

In all of the most widely circulated Parisian journals they had his death published, hoping that it might meet Maud Alton's eyes, and also advertised urgently and repeatedly for her, but no answer came.

In Père la Chaise, they buried him, and soon after left Paris, resolved, if possible, to find the missing woman, who, before the law, had been his wife.

Through England, Germany, Switzerland and

Italy, they searched for her in vain. As la Véturie and as Maud Alton, she seemed to have disappeared and left no trace behind her. At last, after long, weary weeks, they had a hope that she was found.

From choice they traveled by vettura from Florence to Rome; and Mr. St. George learned from their vetturino, by the mere accident of a chance conversation, that a beautiful woman answering to her description, and unattended save by a maid, had near Arezzo, met with an accident, which had injured her for life, by the overturning of the vettura in which she was traveling. One wheel had come off and precipitated the vehicle, over a slight embankment. No one else was seriously hurt, but this lady, and one of her limbs was badly crushed.

"They took her to Arezzo," he said, where he learned she had been carefully nursed by nuns, and had at last sufficiently recovered to be removed to Rome, where, he understood, she was to take the veil.

"Her uncommon beauty," the man said too, "elicited from all, curiosity, and deep interest in her fate. We heard, also," he concluded, "that she was a famous woman in disguise, and naturally have tried to follow her movements."

After reaching Rome, having little doubt of Maud Alton's identity with the unfortunate lady of whom the vetturino had told them, they left no means untried to discover her retreat, but found not even a trace of her, until it was publicly known, that la Véturie, the beautiful and renowned actress,

had voluntarily renounced the world, its pomps and vanities, to become the bride of the church.

In vain they attempted to see her, and all communications that they addressed to her, were returned unopened.

Like waves against some rock-bound shore, the world that had worshiped her, with rash protestings surged against her sacred prison doors; then rolled back, leaving no impress, and bearing away no sign.

La Véturie was as dead to them, as if she had passed from the bonds of time.

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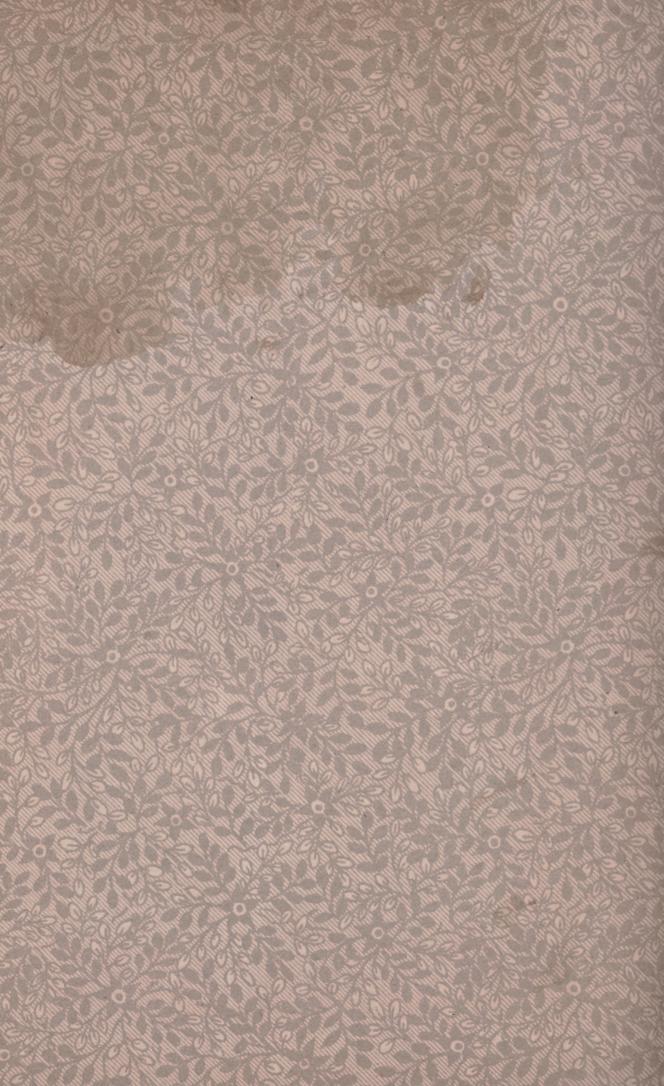














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